ETHICS OF ACTIVITY: SOUTH ASIAN SHIA WORKING LIFE IN DUBAI

by
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Abstract

This dissertation explains how environmental conditions foster ethics of behavior common to various spheres of life-activity: leisure, work, and religious practice, for instance. The research conceives present-day Dubai—the site of research—as a work environment (populated 90% by working expatriates). The city's particular orientation to labor is an aspect of its immersion in regional and global flows: economic and natural. Dubai has grown a) as a trade *entrepôt* and a node in global supply chains, and b) by producing manufactured landscapes that overcome harsh environmental conditions.

To evaluate the phenomenon of natural-material and environmental forces that foster ethics common to various life activities, the research follows members of Dubai's Shia Muslim community of Indo-Pakistani heritage, as they move through various sites of daily activity. In doing so, the data note how dispositions of members transcend across experiences. Constrained in Dubai, but globally connected through kinship ties and sectarian identity, members transform the experience of religious practice and downtime activities with qualities particular to worklife. Despite a variety of limitations on activity in Dubai that members characterize as *majbūrī* (compulsion), particular experiences of work and qualities of the environment magnify ethics of both excess and efficiency germane to Shia practice.

The constructed environment also helps manifest a range of aspirations and anxieties that are expressed in leisure-time activities. Urban architectures here are both projections of desire and objects of concealment—obscuring feared realities—

especially for those employed in construction firms or who provide construction-related services. These are thus forms of imagination attuned to ethics of the often-precarious pursuit of work. Finally, the research sees "constraint" as an ethic of migrant living and space management in Dubai, which fosters a form of "disciplined creativity" in religious expression and poetic performance, in the space of audio recording studios.

The dissertation committee members were Anand Pandian (primary advisor), Veena Das, Steven Caton, Erica Schoenberger, and Ryan Calder.

Note on Transliteration

The text of this dissertation includes a variety of Urdu, Arabic, Persian, and Pashto words. I have transliterated them into Roman script using the ALA-LC Romanization system, a popular standardized method. In a few cases, for better readability, I have slightly modified the ALA-LC guide to more closely hue to the system adopted in the Platts Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī, and English (see Platts 1884).

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Introduction

On a late spring morning that grew hot—discouraging unnecessary outside activity—I sat with several informants and friends in a small air-conditioned room: a living space together shared by six. While most sat idly, one—who I'll call Tamir—turned toward me from the computer where he was seated, and announced with mild frustration and amusement that he had been locked out of his Facebook account. Tamir's account had been "temporarily suspended" the screen in front of him conveyed. Joining him to confront the puzzle, we clicked through a "reclaim your account" process. A new screen flashed, and on it a familiar image: a religious text in Arabic with vague forms against a black background, as I remembered it later in notes. I took it as one of a variety of images that members in this Shia Muslim community engage online: abstract images often featuring a horse or faceless human figure framed by messages of inspiration or protest.

The details would prove unhelpful to the challenge before us, it seemed. A multiple choice question asked Tamir to identify the "person" who appears in the photo. This was an exercise in linking the profile photo with the profiled person. Since the image was not an authentic personal representation, we were hard-pressed to answer.

Submitting a guess, we moved through successive multiple-choice test screens. A few contained images of people. The problem for Tamir was multiple: a) he did not know everyone who he was friends with; b) many friends in his network did not use an actual self-image as their profile photo; and c) some of his "friends" were not people but organizations. Such patterns of usage amount to a problem for

Facebook, it would seem. In challenging Tamir to match profile photos to users' identifications, Facebook conveys its preference for authentic accounts linked to live human users. The restoration process includes the expectation that users know their friends by face and by name, even though both are self-submitted by the person (or non-person).

After several minutes of successive guesses, a screen announced that we had failed: his account remained locked, and his authenticity in Facebook's universe remained uncertain. Facebook offered an alternative method to restore the account: send a photocopy of a valid photo ID indicating the name of the person on the account. (Indeed he had used his real name and an authentic self-photo on his own account profile.) With a mix of some embarrassment, frustration, amusement and boredom, he seemed to give up. The attentions of others shifted back to other forms of work, downtime, internet-use, and idle conversation.

I am not sure what Tamir might have done after I left that day. We met elsewhere thereafter. Months later, I found him back in the same room seated in front of the same computer, again using Facebook. I asked about his account's status, and he confirmed only that he had restored it. He flashed a grin and chuckled, at once seeming to downplay the initial problem and failure, and to convey some assurance and satisfaction. Then, in the flow of the downtime activity, with his friends and coworkers gathered in the room as well, his attention and mine again shifted. I never learned how he unlocked it.

Energy and instability of migrant life

I begin with the scene of an impasse: one that I believe appears from one angle as a confrontation between boundaries and migrant life. Migrant work often occupies space at the limits of society (Jackson 2011) and pushes the limit of human endurance (Jackson 2008, 58). To be a migrant, a member of the economic underclass,[1] is often to be "locked out:" to be buffered by boundaries (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015). *Kafāla*—the system by which foreign labor in the Arabian Gulf is managed by citizens—configures one type of boundary. Asgar, like Tamir, was a key figure from my core field research group in Dubai: male laborers belonging to a broad Shia Muslim expatriate community of South Asian heritage. He described to me how his local employer denied him permission to take a driving course and get a driver's license—part of his effort to land a better job. Professional advancement opportunities for foreign workers, including entry into driver's training courses, require the employer's permission, reflecting paternalistic control mechanisms built into *kafāla*. Lack of cash resources, urban sound ordinances, and deviant social media usage each also generate their own boundaries.

Multiple interactions from my research captured for me a central puzzle about how migrant life in Dubai endures in the face of structures designed to contain and constrain it. To begin to break down this puzzle, I first consider the two entities of this encounter. On one side is migrant life, and on the other side is the "life" of boundaries. Events of transgression—the achievement of unlocking an

[1] On the central role of margins, exclusion, and isolation in conforming myriad experiences of economic precarity in a variety of anthropological literature, see Das and Poole 2004, Biehl 2013, Allison 2013, Lucht 2011.

online account, for instance—may be the outcome of the strength or weakness of one or the other entity.

The propellant energy of migrant life draws in part on the transitory and unsettled nature of the category, and on the high stakes involved. A variety of literature on migrancy explores how life itself is often at stake in migrant activities (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Sandell 2010; Holmes 2013). I highlight a few instances from my fieldwork that affirm both the high stakes and the specter of death or radical interruption. Nadim, for instance, worked in a large centrally-located industrial area in Dubai. He once described to me—with some excitement and nervous pride—the specter of death that follows him and his coworkers while working with, on and around heavy building materials such as oil drilling risers. In a close call, he once sustained several broken fingers in an accident when an unsecured riser rolled over his hand, he told me one day, with some bravado. Furthermore, as I describe in Chapter 5 below, the activity of Shia migrant community members recording religious sung poetry in recording studios involved a sense of death and deadness. One night, working late in the highly sound-contained and partitioned interior space of the studio, a small group of singers became locked in after the doorknob on a studio door broke off. Before they were "rescued" by a recording engineer who stumbled in hours later, they had said their *waṣiyyats* (statements of bequethments upon death) to each other.

Alternatively, Asgar, an accountant working for a small construction company, was the only provider for a large family back home in Karachi, following the death of his father only two years prior. Increasingly feeling the failure of his

relatively meager earnings-profits to meet his family's financial needs, he tussled with his employer for a promotion, but in doing so risked the security of the job he had. "But what can I do?," he would ask me. He worried about his mother and sisters' long-term health and wellbeing if he could not improve the family's financial situation.

Tamir was also propelled by some work-related urgency. I followed his Facebook struggle during what was otherwise a fairly desperate time for him. The small company he belonged to in Dubai—a construction "finishing" services company composed of tightknit kin tied to a specific North Indian locality—struggled to turn a profit. Debts from previous projects had long gone unpaid; the leader pursued new loans from friends and kin in Dubai in order to repay older ones. Meanwhile opportunities for new projects were bountiful yet persistently hard to win: seemingly always just out of reach. The group's financial troubles created an atmosphere of desperation that affected their interactions amongst themselves and with outsiders, including me, as I explore further in Chapter 3.

At the same time, Tamir had seemed to recently develop a mysterious ailment affecting his knee, inhibiting his ability to perform adequately at work. His employer discussed with me his intention to send Tamir back to India, to Mumbai, for treatment, as medical costs were much higher in Dubai. Later, I heard through other acquaintances that he had returned to India for treatment and to visit his family. Many months after that, his coworker told me that he had received treatment there and returned to Dubai, and was again working for the company. The demands of work created some urgency for Tamir—a determination to keep his job that

affected his determined efforts outside of work. The imperative to work is ultimately an imperative to act. This imperative drives certain qualities of work—a tempo, a sense of urgency, a force of activity—into actions outside of itself: into the mundane effort to maintain a social media account, for instance.

Over the course of many research months in Dubai tracking forms of migrant life, I came to see "ethics" of activity common across various domains of life. While I accompanied many members of this community to their workplaces, where I observed them and sometimes helped them with their work processes, I also accessed a rich world of downtime activity and socialization in this diverse religious Shia community. While Tamir seemed to project assured confidence at his achievement overcoming Facebook's regulatory apparatus, I observed others busily engage themselves in service and benefit- (*fā'ida* / *ṣawāb*) seeking activities. As I explore further in Chapter 1 below, Nadim would regularly leave work in the industrial area after a long day shift and walk twenty minutes to the mosque for evening prayers, where he also assumed an informal caretaker role, serving snacks and tea to the assembled faithful (*mōminīn*). He was ubiquitous; everyone seemed to know him, which made his abrupt announcement one day that he was returning to India all the more conspicuous and surprising.

Similarly Saad—a main character in Chapter 5 below—worked as a salesperson at a small cosmetic accessories shop in Sharjah. After his shift ended at 9pm in Ramadan, he would make his way to a recording studio and record overnight, sometimes ending his session around 6am, just before the *fajr* pre-dawn prayers. He would then sometimes return to his shop to sleep for a few hours before

opening time, rather than returning to his room in Dubai. "*Al-ḥamdu lillāh* (praise God) I am busy," he would say to me.

As one aspect of my informants cultivating ethics common across life activities, in other words, I began to notice how the energy and intensity of work in Dubai came to infuse and orient downtime or afterwork-time activities. One thread running through the stories of Nadim, Asgar, and Tamir above is the sense of being diminished by mighty forces that appear to elude understanding or mastery. Though profits, material accumulations, and knowledge of markets and systems are elusive, I found that people draw on a *repertoire of actions* related to work, in order to lend energy and meaning to non-work activities. I consider this the persistence of migrant life inside (or in positive relation to) systems that are otherwise designed for its exclusion.

Most broadly, this dissertation considers how members of this migrant community align experiences across different domains of life: between religious activities, leisure activities, and workplace activities, for instance. To evaluate this phenomenon in one way—i.e. the way in which work ethics impact and conform non-work activities—I develop a theory and concept of "worklife" as a category and condition of migrant life in Dubai. Dubai's economy oriented toward diversification (away from energy production) feeds a high demand for foreign labor and sustains a large migrant population, and this provides one sense of my interpretation of life in Dubai as "worklife." But more specifically, I see worklife as a sensibility and ethic of action of foreign workers relative to spatial "gaps" in the environment, spaces which are themselves the outcomes and productions of forces of growth and regulation in

Dubai. These spaces of "absence" include the austere spaces of audio recording studios and blood clinics. They include the vacant and unfinished properties tied to the collapse of the real estate market. And they include a range of eerily quiet and orderly public spaces in Dubai, maintained by a heavy state security and enforcement apparatus. In my formulation, "worklife" in Dubai not only denotes a spirit of productivity particular to rapid economic growth, but more specifically, a spirit of migrant activity that infuses spaces characterized by austerity and inactivity: spaces that are byproducts of economic development processes.

Spirit of work immanent to life

Thinking beyond the "force" particular to migrant work and life—that is, the energy rooted in the particular precarity, high stakes, instability, or impermanence of the category—I also explore the (re-)spatialization of labor in relation to its objects of production in Dubai: a reconfiguration by which boundaries become diminished. Work is often seen as a production process: one that brings products, livelihoods, and ways of life into being in a wider world. I explore below how migrant laboring effectively rearranges the relationship of various domains of life to each other, and to the world. How might worklife enfold the space occupied by its product-outcomes? How might a spirit or activity of work become "immanent" to—that is, embedded across—various domains of life? I draw on the concept of an ethics of activity "immanent" to everyday life from Michael Lambek's recent work (2015, 1), which I further develop in the next section below.

The orientation of labor process to labor's products depends in part, I propose, on the worker's orientation to place. Marshall Sahlins has called our attention to the evolution of labor's proximity to the site of its primary accumulation: the household. In "domestic modes of production," for instance, labor and household are structured together: the household is "charged with production, with the deployment and use of labor-power." Labor in this case is a "primitive" mode of production. Then, under industrialization, production and labor power become detached and are alienated from the "familial circle," while the household becomes merely a site of consumption (Sahlins 1972, 76-77). Contexts of industrialized or "extra-domestic" labor premise a worker who regularly navigates between labor and domestic spheres arrayed distinctly in the environment. The industrial model projects labor as spatially delimited.

Arrangements of migrant work further extend the alienation of labor from the home. Here, object-outcomes of work are configured at a distant remove from the labor process. For migrants in Dubai, even financial resources do not accumulate locally, as workers remit their earnings' profits and are unable to open local bank accounts. Little accumulates beyond what is necessary for basic and efficient livelihood in Dubai. While work is present in Dubai, the external outcomes—the livelihoods of dependents, material and monetary accumulations—of the labor process are largely absent.

Of course parallel examples to the situation of migrant work in Dubai exist in industrial and "primitive" domestic modes of labor as well, where labor reworks, infuses, or coopts other spheres of life. A variety of ethnographic studies focus on

how certain labor practices disrupt traditional kin relations, and rework domestic spaces. Aihwa Ong offers the case of female factory workers in Malaysia who cultivate self-discipline through industrialized labor, and thus upset traditional domestic social roles in their community by defying the need for male authority. Industrial labor provides a linkage to broader capitalist markets and state structures, and thus diminishes the cohesion of traditional kin and family structures. (Ong 2010, 6-7). Others explore how domestic work activities such as weaving help structure kinship. Brinkley Messick, for instance, describes how the ritual actions of weaving underscores the birthing process (Messick 1987, 212-213). Deepak Mehta similarly shows how the weaving process defines and effects gender roles within the family while it "marks out the space and time of the household" (Mehta 1997, 66).

Labor's hegemony over life in Dubai may be registered in a variety of ways. Labor is synonymous with "being" in Dubai for working foreigners, who comprise 89% of the total population, half of whom are South Asian. Work disruption prompts the worker's swift departure via deportation, or its threat. Naturalized citizenship is extremely rare, even for long-term foreign residents. One participant active in the local Shia community in Dubai emigrated from Tanzania in 1976, but continued to renew his temporary work visa in Dubai every three years, all the while maintaining his Tanzanian citizenship. The tourist visa category in the U.A.E. skews toward Western visitors, many of whom qualify for free on-arrival visas, while Asian visitors pay nearly $200 USD for the same privilege. There is little room for idle non-Western bodies.

Employment's insecurity creates an environment of urgency. As Arabian Gulf states have pursued economic diversification away from dependence on oil production, many have nurtured the development of academic institutions with United States accreditations, for instance. Still, few such academic institutions offer the types of job security structures, such as tenure, typical to Western universities. The trend mirrors the temporality of other forms of employment, and also the sense of uncertainty about Dubai's survival in the near future, especially given its meteoric rise. The enduring image of abandoned cars—even luxury sports cars—on the road to the airport is an emblematic reminder of abrupt departures and changes of fortunes for expatriate residents. People worry about the next market crash.

My informants conceived work and life in Dubai as conditioned by compulsion and constraint, using the word *majbūrī*. A variety of Urdu speakers outside of my research context described *majbūrī* as a kind of "fateful compulsion:" a condition of being compelled to do something in the absence of any alternative. Given the contexts in Dubai in which my informants spoke of work and life as *majbūrī*, and given the word's derivation, I offer a slightly more general understanding of *majbūrī* as a condition of being compelled to do something by external forces. A classic Urdu to English dictionary connotes the root word *jabr* (from the Arabic root *j-b-r*) as "compulsion, constraint," "force, power," or "violence, oppression."[2] Grammatically, *Majbūrī* is the abstract noun constructed from the passive participle (*majbūr*) of *jabr*. It thus connotes the condition of the being the object of *jabr*, in its myriad meanings. This broader understanding of *majbūrī*

[2] Platts, John T. 2003. "Jabr." In *A Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī, and English*, 375. Delhi: Urdu Academy.

captures the wide range of migrant experience in Dubai, which I observed my informants to gloss and align together in using this term.

One soft-spoken Pakistani man used it in a conversation with me in which I probed his experiences and background in Dubai. He explained how he had been hired by the local *jamā'at* board (Shia community's religious leadership) as a caretaker of the local *imāmbārgāh*[3] many years prior, when he had lost his previous job as a driver for a private company. We stood in the courtyard area of the *imāmbārgāh* as he spoke, in the shadow of a lighted announcement board dedicated to job-seeking advertisements, which was overflowing with the one-page resumes of men of various ages from the community. Most had a small passport-style photo affixed to the resume's upper right corner. The backdrop framed our conversation, providing a reminder of the centrality of work for individuals in this community, and of the earnest aspirations of job-seekers. He paused after describing how fortunate he was to get the job with the Shia *jamā'at*, and then remarked, *Dubai baṛī majbūrī hē* (Dubai is very *majbūrī*), by which I took him to mean "life in Dubai is very constrained and oppressed"

As I outline further in Chapter 1, a variety of my research experiences relate to time spent driving around Dubai, and occasionally to other neighboring emirates, for various participants' work and leisure-related activities. Conversations turned toward a consideration of *majbūrī* here as well. On one occasion I rode as a passenger in a car with three laborers who were roommates in one of Dubai's

[3] An *imāmbārgāh* functions as a Shia community gathering center especially used for commemorative functions and weekly Thursday night gatherings, though the range of uses can be diverse. The name literally translates as "place of the Imams." In South Asian Shia traditions, such a center is also sometimes called a *ḥussainiya* or *'āshūrk̲h̲āna*.

outlying residential areas. At one moment, as we drove at night on major highway, our oncoming view of the road became framed by a cluster of road signs—one marking speed limits, another instructing drivers to stay in lanes, and then just beyond, an upcoming automated overhead toll collection gate. One fellow passenger gestured toward the array of signage, and made the same comment the *imāmbārgāh* caretaker had made, about Dubai being very *majbūrī* (*Dubai baṛī majbūrī hē*). I took him to mean, again, that life is Dubai is very constrained, though in this case by virtue of strict rules and regulatory forces: an aspect of the compulsion one feels vis-à-vis migrant work in Dubai.

Road networks in the Gulf are central infrastructures and sites of both aggressive state control and surveillance as well as subversive activities (Menoret 2014, 12). Members of my target community regularly conformed to strictly enforced speed limits and other conventions of road use dissimilar to their typical driving experiences in India and Pakistan. Using *majbūrī* in this context links the compulsion to work with the "oppression" of rules as both central to the experience of life in Dubai.

Labor: beyond power relations and materiality

A strand of French social theory in the twentieth century turned toward the body and its actions, activities, and movements, in order to understand the operation of political power and authority over societies. Marcel Mauss shows how a broad cross-section of "assembled actions"—which he calls "techniques of the body"—are learned, primarily through imitation. As such, they are "collective"

actions: more social than "psychological." They are imposed on the individual from without: often "from above," by another who has authority over him (Mauss 1973, 73, 76).

Where Mauss sees the work of social authority over bodily techniques, Michel Foucault focuses instead on the work of political power (of state power, for instance). Such power operates through and becomes vested in the various micro-movements, comportments, and "functionings" of individual bodies. Foucault's analysis also privileges the role of labor activities to mediate political power: "it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination." Labor is then the catalyst driving this "political technologization" of the body: the process creating the body's "multiform instrumentation" (Foucault 1979, 26). I take Foucault's formation, in other words, as a way to see the imbrication of political and labor power in the formulation of various bodily actions.

Key anthropological studies on the transformation of life by labor have drawn especially on the work of Foucault to see how power and hegemony drive this transformation. These studies retain a vertical understanding of how bodily activities are constituted. Reflecting Foucault's concerns, Aihwa Ong explores how bureaucratic mechanisms appropriate capitalist workplace discipline to drive shifts in practices, behaviors, and relations across everyday life (Ong 2010, 2-4). Daromir Rudnyckyj explores what he calls the technologies deployed by the companies and NGOs that prepare Indonesian out-migrants for work abroad. These "technologies of servitude" substitute for the technologies of states in order to "produce subjects capable of domestic labor transnationally" (Rudnyckyj 2004, 412).

In my present study, I do not seek to disavow vertical power as a "technology of domination" central to both political power and the "management of individuals" (Foucault 1988, 18-19). Indeed patron-client relations particular to the Gulf states and other "patrimonial" state societies help shape and limit migrant life and work. Nonetheless, I am more interested in tracing the pervading spread and outward radiation of worklife into other forms, functions, and activities of everyday life. In this way, I see the transformation of life forms as driven not by vertical power relations as such, but by the particular energy, form, and character of work itself. This is a lateral-horizontal movement that draws on the destructive energy of global systems geared toward endless expansion and boundary erasure. It reflects Foucault's notion of capillary power: a type of omnipresent disciplinary power typified for Foucault by the panopticon (Foucault 1979, 198).

Focusing on work as energy and activity, I also contrast with other studies that see the operation of work on life as a material or "instrumental" process. In a memorable tribute to the anthropologist Louis Dumont, Jean-Claude Galey (1981, 4) has described the artisan as he who works on himself as he does his craft. Anand Pandian (2009, 50-51) describes how low-income farmers in South India come to see themselves as extensions of their tools: the qualitative state of the tool effects the qualitative state of the individual. Similarly, Deepak Mehta describes how the quintessential experience of work—pain—is rooted for Ansari weavers in North India in an original painful experience, which male family members "inscribe" onto the male child: the circumcision. This act is aligned with the condition of being a

"skillful weaver" and "good Muslim," in which the endurance of pain is central to each experience (Mehta 1997, 32).

This dissertation explores work's impact on life not as a physical trace, bodily comportment, or manifestation of power relations. Rather, I see work's impact as a kind of energy, a tempo, a repertoire of disciplined actions, and a way of communication; in short, a *way* of life. Like other anthropologists working in similar milieus to mine (Hirschkind 2006), I find Walter Benjamin's model particularly helpful, in which he suggests that the rhythms of repetitive work enable patterns of listening, remembering, and communication that are otherwise lost and foreclosed.[4] I argue that the combination in the individual of the imperative to work and the imperative to follow Dubai rules and regulations affects the urgency and intensity of non-work activities.

Environmental forces, worklife, and ethics of activity

This dissertation attempts to trace a germ of ethical actions across various domains of life. As such, it accounts for how religious actions are transformed by worklife imperatives, for instance. In Chapter 1, I describe how an imperative to make money and work within rules conforms an ethic of efficiency that Shia migrants in Dubai drew upon as they adapted their performance of commemorative religious rituals to non-religious environments. Similarly, in Chapter 5, I explore how ordinances and enforcements designed to contain construction noise and the enclosure of religious activities inspire a mode of disciplined creativity particular to

[4] See "The Storyteller" in Benjamin (1968, 83-110).

forms of religious poetic expression. And in Chapter 2, I examine how bloated housing markets awash with vacant properties create space and enable new modes of engaging religious material in the workplace, for one realtor. In general, that is, I explore across these chapters how the activity of work and conditions of work environments conform ethical approaches to religious rituals.

A benchmark for considering the relationship between religious ethics and labor ethics was set by Max Weber in his study, originally published in 1905, of asceticism, puritanism, and the "spirit" of capitalistic wealth accumulation (Weber 1992). The temptation toward the enjoyment of idle worldly pleasures disrupts the endeavors of the Puritan Christian ascetic and the capitalist, he writes (104, 112). Both capitalism and Christian asceticism demand an ethic of endless labor in pursuit of useful profit (xxxi-xxxii). The capitalistic ritual of hard work particular to one's "calling" is thus also a religious ritual, to the extent that it allows the ascetic to use his body—that is, God's gift—in the most gainful way (108).

In a similar fashion, Charles Hirschkind describes the practice among taxi drivers in Cairo of listening to sermons as a "distraction from toil," or paraphrased otherwise, mindfulness in toil (Hirschkind 2006, 22). A taxi driver in Hirschkind's ethnography suggests that listening to sermons while driving allows him to better perform his job: to not "get upset" and "shout at other drivers" (72). At the same time, the dull monotonous rhythms of taxi driving create a sensorium disposed to the apprehension of religious expressive content. Work itself thus contributes to ethical living and the pursuit of piety, Hirschkind argues (27).

Especially in Chapter 1 I trace this type of ideal—in which work and religious activities become "rationalized" together—through an ethic of efficient worklife and religious action among members of this Shia community in Dubai. But my study deemphasizes a focus on toil and investigates a wider range of activities. Specifically, I investigate how downtime—the mundane texture and rhythm of everyday life—is transformed by the ethics of religious practice and of work. Put differently, I examine the mode by which ethics of mundane life, worklife, and religious life are aligned. Expanding on Weber, I conceive worklife as an enterprise broader than that delimited by one's calling or employment, or by well-defined workplaces or workdays.

This more holistic view of worklife and ethics common across life activities builds on the recent interest among anthropologists to conceive and study ethics neither as a cluster of frameworks and rules, nor as a matter of contemplating good behavior at a remove from ritual practices, but rather as embedded in the practice of everyday life itself (see for instance Pandian and Ali 2010, 2). In important ways, Michael Lambek has heralded a turn toward thinking of "ordinary ethics" (2010) as those "immanent" and "intrinsic" to life itself: "*within* the ordinary rather than exemplifying an attempt to escape it or making a purchase outside it" (2015, 1, 27, emphasis original). In a mode with which Lambek finds sympathy, Veena Das has also argued for:

> … a shift in perspective from thinking of ethics as made up of judgments we arrive at when we stand away from our ordinary practices to that of thinking of the ethical as a dimension of everyday life in which we are not aspiring to escape the ordinary but rather to descend into it as a way of becoming moral subjects. (Das 2012, 134)

Crucially, Das's analysis aims to interrogate the linkage between everyday acts and wider world events. The challenge for Das is how everyday ethical actions and expressions endure in the face of pervasive "world-annihilating" violence and hate (Das 2015, 54-55).

I conceive "ethics of activity" as an ethics of bodily movement and comportment continuous across social contexts and the punctuated time of social events. It thus builds on Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) and Marcel Mauss' (1973) theories of "habitus," which sees actions as outcomes of learned and internalized habits and routines. Ethics of activity also builds on Das's notion of "ethics as an expression of life taken as a whole" (Das 2015, 56). Similar to Das's formulation, an ethics of activity is not delimited to particular events or particular contexts, though such activities may be "shadowed by doubts" about potential future calamities. In Chapter 4, I investigate how a genre of crime storytelling builds on imperatives to represent, identify and "pin down" nebulous fears, as part of migrant efforts to reclaim empty space. Storytelling here pulls the past experiences of violence into the everyday, and is structured by an ethics particular to experiences and strategies of migrant life in Dubai.

Essential to the ethics of activity I explore in Chapter 4 and elsewhere is less a mode of detached "reflection" than it is a quality of vacated space. Qualities of vacant, austere, and controlled spaces—living space partitions, empty public lots, vacant residential properties, unfinished constructions, medical clinics—allow for particular migrant forms of activity and thus the cultivation of ethical modes of being, which are common across worklife, religious life, and leisure time. On the one

hand, this counters certain other recent anthropological formulations about the necessary role of "reflection" in the practice of everyday ethics (Faubion 2011, 20; Laidlaw 2013, 44). But furthermore, my approach extends upon the work of Das and Lambek to see how environmental qualities and forces impinge on everyday life and structure ethics of activity.

My study thus allows me to think between the recent work on "ordinary ethics" and other work on environmental ethics. Anand Pandian has charted a colonial history in Tamil Nadu in which qualities of agricultural land account for the cultivation of work ethics and moral being among members of a "criminal" caste. Administrators linked "arid, rocky and infertile" lands to idleness, and thus to a criminal nature. To address the latter problem, and to encourage productive toil, administrators developed programs to offer land to farmers, which they described as "good dry land, red soil, good rain-fall, healthy country" (Pandian 2009, 148-149). And James Laidlaw has explored how members of the global Jain community preserve a conservationist spirit at the heart of Jain ideology. While an environment full of perils prompts ascetic Jains in India to assiduously avoid harming living things, lay Jains outside India also compelled to be "green" sensitive, replacing traditional vegetarianism with the stricter ethic of veganism, for instance (Laidlaw 2010, 64). This dissertation builds on this literature to show how qualities of environments crucially infuse the cultivation of everyday ethics across domains of life activity.

Multiple Conceptions of Environment

This dissertation carefully considers the role of natural environments to conform activities for members of this migrant community, and to allow members to align experiences across domains of life. In Chapter 1, for instance, I show how the imperative to conserve water, as an ethic of desert life, aligns with the commemoration of Hussain's ordeal at Karbala, in which he and his faction were denied potable water by their enemy. Still, I wish to clarify that my concern about "environmental forces" extends beyond the correlation of environment with "nature." In particular, I build on notions in the scholarship on urban built environments, and on mediascapes, that explore the role of those environments in the cultivation and conformation of ethical actions.

A set of interrogations into urban built environments notes how infrastructures function to multiple the range of activities in urban life. Nigel Thrift and Ash Amin described a process that they term "the urban engineering of passions," where the aesthetics and infrastructures of built environments "produce" "rituals of desire, love, greed, and want." Thrift and Amin consider how urban spaces "spark" passionate drives: "the *desire* for certain types of food or the *urge* to relax in the open spaces of the city" (Amin and Thrift 2007, 155-156, my emphasis). Nikhil Anand explores how the infrastructures of pressurized water in Mumbai enable forms of "hydraulic citizenship" and allow for making "political claims that exceed the framework of liberal, modern citizenship" (Anand 2011, 545).

Brian Larkin describes how infrastructures "mediate and shape the nature of economic and cultural flows and the fabric of urban life" (Larkin 2008, 6-7). Narrating the evolution of cinema as an urban institution and infrastructure in

Nigeria, Brian Larkin acknowledges the colonial legacy of infrastructural development to "create specific sorts of social subjects." He cites radio networks and cinemas, for instance, as constructions geared to "educating and developing Nigerians into 'modern' colonial citizens" (3). Still, in postcolonial Kano, he illustrates how cinema-goers "reimagine" and re-appropriate these technologies of colonial governance (12). To trace infrastructural effects beyond regulation and discipline, Larkin explores how "material structures produce immaterial forms of urbanism—the senses of excitement, danger, or stimulation that suffuse different spaces in the city and create the experience of what urbanism is" (13). He develops a notion of urban sensory experience that correlates with Thrift and Amin's notion in the "urban engineering of passions."

Like Larkin, I consider the role of infrastructures, of roads for instance in Chapter 1, to both regulate and constrain activities while also allowing a wider range of ethical and beneficial activities to be performed by members of this community. And in Chapter 3 I examine how landmark and grandiose architectures structure the aspirations of laborers in the construction and interior design industries, both propelling their work in Dubai and destabilizing their social relations. I highlight, in other words, the diminishing and enabling effects of urban infrastructures on modes of urban work and life.

In Arjun Appadurai's influential formation of *mediascapes*, images and narratives serve to "mediate" reality. These forms provide consumers—i.e. those who inhabit the media landscape—a "material" basis upon which to build "scripts" for life. Appadurai especially supposes that these mediated forms allow consumers

to script "imaged" lives, of themselves or of others. Building on Appadurai's formulation, a set of studies have described the role of media to amplify and proliferate spiritual practices (for instance, see the edited volume, Meyer and Moors 2005). Rosalind Morris for instance describes how the proliferation of mass media in Thailand allowed "mediumship" practices to be "reborn," and that the "displacement" inherent to mediated representations resonates with, and provides a metaphor for, the spiritual displacement of the medium's body (Morris 2000, 460, 465). Though building on a different philosophical tradition than Appadurai does, through Derrida and Levinas, Hent de Vries further extends this homology between public religious forms and media, arguing for the always already-mediated nature of religion as "manifest" in the world (De Vries 2001, 28; see also Hirschkind 2011).

These formulations on the resonance of religious and spiritual forms in and through media is helpful to my account of religious imagery in Chapter 2, as I argue that the pervasion of cell phones, and the ease of religious video and image viewing in spaces and times of leisure, allow working Shia in Dubai the opportunity to immerse themselves in the commemoration of Karbala and Hussain's martyrdom. Easy access to cell phones and computers allow Shias to immerse themselves in religious materials in work and leisure spaces, and to better conduct themselves as Shias in everyday life.

Multiple overlapping systems of instability

The phenomenon where qualities of worklife come to dominate migrant life in Dubai reflects other "totalizing" forms of state control and regulation. As I develop

further in Chapter 5, the security apparatus in Dubai works to protect materials in the environment that are deemed "sensitive:" mosques and hospitals, for instance. The "becoming-sensitive" of materials in Dubai reflects the materiality and intimacy of the recording studio. I argue in Chapter 5 how studio spaces become central to religious production activities in Dubai, where regulations against public noise force performances indoors. Comparable to the presence of the microphone in the studio, public space in Dubai is strewn with sensitive receptors of various kinds: static fixtures in the environment including police surveillance cameras and institutions such as mosques. These materials vibrate and become agitated as they receive information and impulses from the public activity of everyday life. Their presence in the environment functions to discipline actions, just as recording devices force disciplined control over sound production techniques in studios. The proliferation of intimate indoor spaces for religious activity across and around Dubai, especially of studios, mirrors the transformation of public outdoor space into an environment of sensitive reception.

Secondly, consider the central mechanism by which *kafāla* operates in Dubai. This social/labor regulatory system capacitates citizens to regulate foreign labor. These citizens are thereby incorporated into the broad rentier class and clientelist framework of governance that extends from the ruling family. The expansion of the ruling class to encompass other groups in the general population has been called the "clientization of society" (Cammett et al. 2015, 329). Here, the ruling class stands in for and encompasses society.

Neha Vora has argued for the expansion of these clientelist webs into the foreign (non-citizen) managerial class as well, in which such foreign-born managers stand in and act for native citizen sponsors, who themselves act for the state (Vora 2013, 14-15). Non-native business managers are granted rights to control their non-native employees via means such as holding passports and refusing to transfer their work rights to other Emirates-based employers (93, 110-111). In exploring the experience of middle- and merchant-class Indians in present-day Dubai, Vora thus argues for the fluidity and porosity of the categories that vanguard national belonging, a condition broadly applicable to the Gulf region (6). By disavowing identity to the nation in the juridico-legal sense—while performing "citizenship" in other ways—Vora suggests that members of the managerial foreign resident community blur the boundaries that vanguard citizenship (3).[5]

The patterns of growth particular to Dubai I have thus far outlined, where parts encompass wholes—the clientization of society, the "studioization" of public space, and the becoming worklife of life—reflect development strategies particular to Dubai aimed at managing the threat of broad external global forces of destabilization. Dubai's cultivation of an environment around work and wealth-seeking activities, for instance, functions to delimit the flowering of disruptive activities—political protest, criminality, terrorism, for instance—that may take root in conditions of idleness and boredom. Clientization and studioization both function

[5] Excluded from Vora's model of "imagined citizenship," as she acknowledges, is the vast non-managerial foreign working class, to which the majority of my research participants belong. While I believe my informants were little concerned with "national belonging" per se, I explore, in the next subsection below and in subsequent chapters, some the of powerful external forces that function to further diminish the salience of class boundaries.

to control the cultural-criminal threat associated with the trans-regional migrant labor market (Vora 2013; Lori 2011). I consider Dubai a node in a system of multiple overlapping global forces of disruption. These forces include the transregional flow of labor and money, terror networks and the "criminality" of foreigners, and the disruptive force of natural erosion particular to desert environments. I explore these forces further below, in later sections of this introduction. Let me first consider, however, how destabilizing systems are thought to interconnect in a world of rapid capitalist expansion.

Immanence and global fragility

Vora explains how a neoliberal state-project like Dubai is necessarily one where participation in the economy does not guarantee entry into or protections by the state. Wrested from state regulations, "neoliberal" economies are thus more aligned with the natural dynamism and unpredictability of other open systems seemingly beyond human control. William Connolly deems this a central aspect of "the contemporary fragility of things:" the alignment and interaction of various non-human systems, such as neoliberal economies and tectonic plate activity, for instance. Evocatively, Connolly invites us to consider a chain of consequences. Appreciating fragility in the world leads one—the political theorist, for example—to reject the notion of the world as designed for humans. This in turn allows one to appreciate the "impingement" of non-economic systems on economic and social life. The "shocks" that mark such instances of impingement then generate new ways of thinking, interpreting, and intervening in the world (Connolly 2013, 26, 28-29).

Above, I descried the multiple modes by which my research participants ascribed *majbūrī* to aspects of their life experiences in Dubai. The confluence of various precarious forces—of insidious criminal behavior and overcrowded labor markets, for instance—functions to diminish belief in the power of design in nature, or of man's mastery over nature, I argue. I noted a variety of fieldwork interactions in which informants appeared to humble themselves in relation to mighty forces outside of their control. Some would fancifully or whimsically described plans and desires to amass great wealth. Others discussed and marveled over the lurid details of rumored criminal events. One guided me through his living environment while bemoaning its constant state of disrepair and structural breakdown, a situation tied to the nefarious effects of sewage basins nearby, whose noxious fumes, when windborne, deluged the habitations.

The orientation of migrants to global systems recalls the findings of other anthropological studies in post-colonial "neoliberal" contexts, in which alienation from markets creates mystical relations between the labor process and modes of accumulation (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Morris 2000). More specifically, the referents of my informant's imaginative musings here are embedded in transregional and global systems of instability: the development economy, the war on terror, the movement of goods and people across navigable waterways, the dynamic movement of windswept sands. Ultimately, the contemporary condition of multiple force-fields that defy mastery has the effect of leveling the playing field. Given radical uncertainty about the future—especially in places like Dubai—the

manager, the oil executive, the royal family members, all face a diminished capacity to be planners or "masters."

Ruptures, crashes, shocks, and disruptions in these systems, either actual or potential, create new socialities—modes of thinking and acting—within Shia and migrant experience, I argue. Furthermore, I find that given the shared helplessness common to all levels in the economic/social hierarchy, the distinction between managers and non-managers loses its salience and fixity, and thus effects a more radical diminishment of boundaries than that which Vora proposes, I find. The vast wealth disparity in the Emirate itself rests on surreal designs and emblems of excess—fantastic construction projects, for instance (Davis 2006). The drive for wealth, as rendered upon the cityscape itself, is extraordinary, unstable, and defies mastery. Rapid cycles of boom and bust make class boundaries fluid, fostering the optimism and aspiration of many low-income South Asian workers I encountered in field research, that they might soon and rapidly gain great wealth.

Precarious life / molecular movements

Taken together, a range of ethnographic literature on precarity reveal how precarious lives are bound by an unstable energy: by cycles of waxing and waning. Accounts depict precarious existences that tend alternately toward action or inaction, movement or stasis, endurance or exhaustion, acceleration or deceleration, life or death. Ann Allison has provided a detailed ethnographic account of the "socially withdrawn" in Japan: of their experiences of economic precarity as diminishment and inaction, tending toward death (Allison 2013, 2-3). Like Connolly,

and my own perspective on life in Dubai, Allison supposes that precarity in one area of life—for instance in uncertain work arrangements—produces precarity elsewhere. It effects the diminishment of one's ability, for instance, to provide for one's family, or to "find the energy to keep going" (9). Joao Biehl has also described the experience of those interred in "zones of social abandonment" in Brazil, awaiting death. Biehl tracks how many engage language and the material world as forms of action in the face of death, to preserve ties to life outside, to "*do something* with what is left of their existence" (Biehl 2013, 42, my emphasis).

Elizabeth Povinelli highlights the oscillation between endurance and exhaustion in precarious experiences. In her *Economies of Abandonment*, for instance, she references a film, *Killer of Sheep*, and the theme of the endurance of African-American life in the face of economic strife and mechanical break-down. Here, Povinelli highlights how labor—the reconstruction of a car from parts, for instance—effects a transformation of a body into something "less exhausted, alienated, and numb," overcoming institutional obstacles to the mobility of various economic underclasses (Povinelli 2011, 102). Similarly, in Kathleen Stewart's *Ordinary Affects*, one reclusive and impoverished rural family is drawn out by taunting youths from the more-affluent surrounding community, in a confrontation that threatens violence. Here, an outwardly sedentary life becomes quickly charged with animus, illustrating for Stewart how ordinary affects are both unstable and active, sites where forces may suddenly gain potency (Stewart 2007, 13-14).

Lives under conditions of economic precarity, ill-health, or violence often embrace activity while being haunted by the specter of imminent death or rupture.

In Dubai, for instance, employment secures the right to reside, while its disruption may likely force one's sudden departure—via deportation or its threat. While I argue that the forms of migrant life I observed in Dubai are not "bare" in the Agambanian sense (Agamben 1998)—a key reference point in Povinelli's formulations of precarious life—they are often haunted by the enduring threat of being undone. As described in the opening sections above, I see these conditions underscoring the activities of Nabil, Saad, and Tamir.

My own ethnography thus reflects the quality of instability in precarious life reflected in literature I highlight. I also expand on this literature by considering more holistically the mutual imbrication of individual precious lives and unstable systems. I note, for instance, that precarious migrant life in Dubai is microcosmic the "life" of the Emirate itself: caught between rapid tempos of growth and the imminent threat of collapse, on the verge of sudden accelerations and disintegrations.[6] Brian Massumi has called attention to the mutually impacting energy of individuals and systems, following Alfred North Whitehead. The individual takes "something of the world's general activity into its own special activity" (Massumi 2011, 28).

Strong security states are undermined by molecular insecurities which "thwart and break through" the boundaries of the state, as well as those internal to the organization: class categories, for instance. Here, Deleuze and Guattari invite us to consider the role of the individual terrorist—"there is always a Palestinian,

[6] This has been formulated, for instance, with respect to the "skyscraper index" theory, of the impact of massive urban construction projects on the performance of economic markets, as I describe further in Chapter 3 below.

Basque, or Corsican"—who would effect a destabilization of "regional security" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 216). Further, the lines that segment "molar" society internally are replaced by various quantum flows: the circulation of money for instance—which breakthrough and cut across demarcated class categories. Ordinary affects are similarly molecular, it seems: things that oscillate in and out of established "wholes," but are themselves fragmentary (Stewart 2007, 6).

Adopting the perspective of Massumi and Deleuze and Guattari, then, we accept that precarious existence has the character of molecular (or micropolitical) activity. Molecular microactivity crystalizes and also reshapes and exceeds segmentary molar structures. This dissertation traces a variety of individual activities that draw on the energy of systems while being external to them. I track movement—of work, leisure activity, rumors—that is both creative and precarious: on the verge of being interrupted.

Dubai: Node of global uncertainty

Dubai's state regulatory apparatus alternately functions to both guard against and profit from the destabilizing effects of global and trans-regional flows. A variety of scholarly literature on Dubai identify the tension between securitization, militarization, and laissez faire economics as an enduring aspect of the Emirate's historical development and present-day identity (Davidson 2008b; Kanna 2011; Vora 2013). The Dubai port's early development occurred, for instance, in a time of great competition with northern rim Gulf ports such as Bander Abbas in Iran, around 1900. Dubai's rulers opted for an informal and lightly regulated system of

trading based on the concept of *hawāla*, in which transactions rely on "personal connections" (Davidson 2008a, 149)—a system typical to Indian Ocean trading practices at the time (Martin 2009, 914-915). In the twenty-first century, *hawāla* is often associated, especially through press reports, with the scourge of rampant money laundering in the Gulf region, including funds linked to terrorist organizations. Reforms enacted shortly after September 11, 2001 have led to some high profile arrests and interventions, but have little affected Dubai's culture of informal lending (Davidson 2008a, 149-151). This research sees the informal lending practices inside this Indo-Pakistani migrant community in Dubai as another legacy of *hawāla* in the region. In Chapter 3 below, I explore how members of the immigrant Shia community in Dubai use means of informal agreement to transact loans among themselves.

In part to counteract the threat of terrorist activity—financial and not—U.A.E. invests heavily in defense. It is currently one of eight countries globally to exceed the United States in defense spending as a percentage of GDP. (Fellow Gulf Cooperation Council member states Oman and Saudi Arabia are also in this category.)[7] Since the "Arab Spring" series of popular uprisings in the Middle East, Gulf states have increasingly invested militarily to maintain regional stability. A variety of policing practices aim to contain a cultural and criminal foreign threat.

[7] World Bank. 2012. Available online [accessed May 12, 2016]: http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS

That "threat" is partly registered by magnitude: the non-national population comprises 89% of the total U.A.E. population.[8]

Dubai nodal status relates to its role in the global economy as an *entrepôt*, being a point of conversion for goods and capital flowing especially from Asia to the Americas. In Chapter 3 I describe a meeting I once had with a businessman who described his plan to develop a transnational goods-shipping business between India and the United States, using Dubai as a way station in the manufacturing and shipping process. Dubai has positioned itself as a re-export *entrepôt* since the early twentieth century, when Persian traders operating in southern Iran suddenly faced new increased customs taxes (Davidson 2007, 34-35). A convergence of crippling United States sanctions on Iran and warming political relations with Gulf countries in general has recently led to Dubai's prominent role in re-exporting goods from Western countries to Iran (Habibi 2010, 1-2).

Such an arrangement highlights one example of how Dubai is thought to profit from regional political instabilities. Additionally, Gulf states, including the U.A.E., have served as a springboard for operations of the American-led War on Terror in the Middle East region (Davis 2006, 58). Also, though Dubai produces far less oil than its neighbors Abu Dhabi, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, it benefits from investments in construction and other development initiatives from its regional partners, and therefore benefits from uncertainties in global oil production and occasional oil shocks that send prices high. In this way, Dubai's economy is not

[8] Gulf Research Center. 2015. *Demography, Migration, and the Labour Market in the U.A.E.,* pg. 8. Available online [accessed May 12, 2016]: http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/36375/GLMM_ExpNote_07_2015.pdf

merely connected to global trade and trends, but is specifically attuned to global disruptions.

Forces particular to the region's desert ecology are also disruptive. Dubai construction operates in relation to the impermanence and fluidity of sand in the landscape. As Mike Davis notes, large Dubai construction projects are often measured in terms of the total cubic feet of sand they displace (Davis 2006, 55). The Emirate invests in the wide-scale regular removal of sand from streets and sidewalk.[9] The landscape's fluidity, tied partly to winds that build over the Arabian Sea, makes it more closely resemble seascape. The dissolution of land and sea casts Dubai as an island in an archipelago of cities, a dominant image in the configuration of pre-19th century visions of the global economy (Braudel 1984, 30; Abu-Lughod 1991, 353).

Key anthropological studies of tribal and Bedouin poetic traditions in the Middle East reveal a metaphorics of the desert as expansive and indefinite. Lila Abu Lughod memorably arrived in the coast region of Egypt's Western Desert only years after her research community of Bedouin nomads discontinued their annual seasonal migration into the desert. Still, they spoke to the anthropologist fondly about the place, configured through memories as the relatively formless "inland 'up-country:'" of dry foods, game, and "grasses so delectable to the gazelle" (Abu-Lughod

[9] 2015. "Bee'ah's Street Fleet." *Clean Middle East*, October: 30-34. Available online [accessed March 28, 2016]: http://www.cleanmiddleeast.ae/articles/692/bee-ah-s-street-fleet.html
Rao, Shreenivasa. "Road/Street Cleaning: Loads Of Pressure Stirs Up Challenging Environment." *Clean Middle East*. Available online [accessed March 28, 2016]: http://www.cleanmiddleeast.ae/articles/578/road-street-cleaning-loads-of-pressure-stirs-up-challenging-environment.html
Kazmi, Aftab. 2012. "Clean-up under way after sandstorm hits UAE." *Gulf News*, February 28. Available online [accessed March 28, 2016].

1999, 40). Exploring spatial metaphors and political rhetoric in the poetic traditions of tribal Highland Yemen, Steven Caton highlights a variety of verses that reference the desert's vastness. One configures the traveler's view of a distant seascape, which on closer inspection is revealed to be a mirage: a metaphor, Caton explains, for the people's lack of political stamina in war (Caton 1990, 202). The convergence of images of sea and desert reflects a metaphorics of expansiveness common to them.

In short, Dubai is alternately destabilized and enriched by the energy of cross-cutting trans-regional and global systems. To the extent that these forces are cultivated and harnessed by laissez faire policies, they underlie the products of deregulation: institutions such as informal lending, and pervasive technologies such as video-streaming mobile phones. Manifested through these products, these global forces shape migrant life and help facilitate the integration of work routines and rhythms into non-work activities and structures: reorienting engagement with religious rituals and reconfiguring kin and friend relations via the qualitative experience of work, for instance. These global forces conform individual activities as an extension of the saturation of markets and physical environments, not as a top-down manifestation of political or social power. I explore these mechanisms and outcomes more fully in the chapters that follow.

An introduction to the core research community

The chapters that follow represent a series of interrogations into configurations of work, religious, and social activity for a minority Muslim community in Dubai. Roughly two dozen characters populate the ethnography that

forms the center of this dissertation. Among them are some of my closest contacts from my core research in Dubai, over fifteen months between 2010-2012. I recorded over fifty pseudonyms in my field notebook. All are a part of a diverse Urdu-speaking Shia community in Dubai, some of whom migrated as early as forty years ago. They came to Dubai from East Africa, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India: places such as Dar-es-Salaam, Mombasa, Karachi, Parachinar, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Bombay, Bangalore, Lucknow, Hallaur, and Allahabad. Indeed some of these places are figures in the ethnography as well.

Through this dissertation and research, I conceive myself constructing an ethnography of a place—of a physical "nexus" of Shia activity in Dubai—and the people who pass through it. My ethnography illuminates how people experience this place, and traces related personal experiences of these individuals outward from there, into other domains and spaces of their lives. This nexus of Shia activity is situated near the physical center of Dubai city: a sprawling urban area that occupies approximately one-third of the total area of the Emirate's 1500 square miles. By comparison New York City's total land area is 303 square miles. The locality at the center of my research is anchored around a dimly-lit commercial side street. The street is capped at one end by a divided main road with upmarket shops and a luxury hotel, and at the other by on open unlit sandlot. Social and religious activities for members of the Shia community were situated around one Shia mosque and an adjacent *imāmbārgāh*: a community gathering and religious worship center.

I have in mind a map of the street: on one corner across from the *imāmbārgāh* was a tailor's shop, and there a young Pakistani tailor's apprentice who

sometimes accompanied me and others on charity food delivery drives. Across from the mosque a barber shop, where poets would sometimes play their new DVDs of dramatic poetic recitations in Urdu for friends, on the wall-mounted TV. (At most other times, the TV typically played an endless series of Pakistani soap operas and comedy shows.) A Chai stall operated by young Bangla men also across from the mosque, and a Pakistani restaurant further up the road. This mixed commercial-resident low-rise locale was cosmopolitan. Public and commercial space was shared mostly between those frequented South Asian Sunni establishments—including a Sunni mosque closer to the upmarket end of the street, as well as Filipino-occupied homes and businesses, such as beauty salons. Some in my research community described for me their illicit sexual relationships with Filipina women, commenting quietly to each other when young Filipino men and women passed. Others described a process of finding a Filipina willing to convert to Islam, and then marrying her, all while maintaining another wife and family back home in Pakistan.

In this dissertation, I construct an image of Dubai that I hope would be familiar to my research participants. I place this impression in relation to other impressions of Dubai that have emerged from other recent research studies, particularly those that consider migrant experiences. My account both reinforces and reshapes some dominant thematic understandings of Dubai—for instance, Dubai as neoliberal "dreamworld" (Davis 2006) or site of neoliberal "exception" (Kanna 2011; Vora 2013)—that emerge through other studies. I consider various assessments of Dubai as "neoliberal" more fully in a discussion in Chapter 5. I recast central contradictions of migrant economic life in Dubai—between experiences

conformed through the "repression" of the strong state security apparatus and through "access" to free markets—while underscoring the centrality to that experience of life in "post-boom" post-2009 Dubai.

Crucial to the definition of my research subject and target community, then, is a freedom of movement. People who attend prayer and *majlis* gatherings at the *imāmbārgāh* and mosque I describe are able to do so given sufficiently-favorable logistical realities, terms of employment, and personal resources. The few workers housed in company accommodation who I chronicle here—for instance, Nadim and Imran—are able to attend gatherings by virtue of their camp's close proximity to the *imāmbārgāh* and mosque. My study, in other words, does not and cannot speak in first-hand detail to the experience of the large population of South Asian migrant workers housed at *distant* labor camps. Members of this category have been chronicled in other studies that have emphasized different aspects of migrant experience. Michelle Buckley, for instance, has chronicled a series of workers' protests—both in public and in the camps themselves—in reaction to withheld wages and poor camp infrastructure (Buckley 2013, 265). The migrant experiences I followed in this research were structured by different configurations of life. The migrant workers who comprise my ethnography enjoyed a greater autonomy of movement and flexibility outside of the labor camp-worksite dyad.

While some worked for large employers in Dubai, in sectors such as maritime trade and international banking, many others worked for small businesses. Asgar for instance was a clerical assistant for a small accounting firm, while Saad was a salesman at a small cosmetics shop. Still others—for instance Kadir and Latif—ran

their own businesses, in construction and technical services respectively. Members I encountered in research were employed in a wide range of occupations across a variety of industries, including: taxi driver, private car driver, light truck operator, tailor's apprentice, barber, restaurant manager, environmental safety officer, car salesman, airport maintenance crew, medical technician, real estate agent, information technology specialist, and industrial machinist.

Situating myself at this physical center of social gathering and religious activity, for members who together comprised a subset of the Dubai's Shia community, I followed a method of building on initial contacts to expand my network of research participants outward. This method most closely resembles "snowball sampling," more familiar in the discipline of sociology, as a way of using informants' own social networks to recruit new participants. As my network of research participants grew over the course of fifteen months in Dubai, I developed a pictorial representation of the web of relations on one page of my research notebook. At the center of the representation was Nadim and Saad, through whose introductions I established numerous additional research participants.

Over the course of my research among this community in Dubai, I counted one woman as a research participant. As a conservative Muslim community, I had little chance to meet women: the wives and adult daughters of the men I interviewed and spent time with. As I describe in greater detail in the next chapter, many in the Khoja community were long-term (10-40 year) residents lived with their full families—spouses and children—in Dubai. Sharif, a worker in his mid-thirties from Islamabad, had also brought his wife and two daughters to Dubai,

where they all lived together in a rented room near the *imāmbārgāh*. Latif had a wife back home in his village in Pakistan's tribal region (FATA).[10] Nadim was also in his early thirties but unmarried. He cited his parents' desire to arrange his marriage as one reason compelling him to return home to his north Indian city in September 2012.

As I have stressed, this research focuses on a diverse Shia migrant/ immigrant community of South Asian heritage. Within this group, I noted through my research that a majority of my key participants fell into one of three main ethnic "categories" or communal identities. The first was the community of *Sayyid* Shias: those who claim lineal descent from the Prophet Muhammad through one of the twelve Shia Imams. Many described to me written genealogies that they kept in their homes in Pakistan and India. One displayed his *shajara*, or "family tree," for me during one interview in Dubai. I describe this episode in greater detail in Chapter 1.

The *Sayyid* Shias I met in Dubai were native to a wide range of localities across both India and Pakistan. They typically spoke Urdu or a Hindi-Urdu dialect as their first language. As I describe further in Chapters 1 and 3, *Sayyids* in the Shia community hold an elite status, which occasionally registered as sense of superiority as they built business and social relationships in this diverse South Asian Shia community in Dubai. Many took the name of the particular Shia Imam through which their genealogical line descended as their own surname.

A second category were those participants who described themselves as Pathan, and most of whom spoke Pashto in addition to Urdu, and had varying

[10] FATA is an acronym that stands for Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

degrees of English proficiency. Pathans—sometimes Anglicized as "Pashtuns" from the Pashto word *Paṣhtūn*[11]—are an ethic group native to regions of eastern Afghanistan and western and northwestern Pakistan. Similar to the *Sayyid* community, Pathans assume shared descent through a common ancestor Qais, a descent which the colonial administrator-turned-historian Olaf Caroe describes as "mythical" in character (Caroe 1958, 9). In Chapter 4 I describe further how individual informants belong to tribes and groups whose identities are attached to specific descendants of Qais. I also describe how the contemporary migration of Pathans to Dubai builds on a longer history of out-migration of people especially from unfarmable and dry regions of Western Pakistan and Eastern Afghanistan, seeking work in the urban centers of South Asia and the Middle East (see further Nichols 2008).

The third ethnic category is the Khoja community, whose members operated the popular *imāmbārgāh* at the center of my research. Historically, the Khojas have been popularly known for having "syncretic" (Asani 2001, 159) and "heterodox" (Solanki 2011, 292-293) religious traditions; they are a community that historian Faisal Devji has called "a Vaishnav *panth*, a Sufi order, a trader's guild and a caste" (Devji 1987, 49). Most histories point to their gradual conversion to a "Persian (Ismaeli) variety of Islam" beginning in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, having been prior to that "an established Hindu trading community in Western India" (Mallampalli 2010, 1057; see also Asani 2011, 97-98). As a consequence of

[11] Etymologically, the colonial administrator-turned-historian Olaf Caroe remarks "the appellation Pathan is the Indian variant of Pukhtanah, the plural of Pakhtun" (Caroe 1958, xv). The Urdu spelling *Paṭhān*, with the addition of the retroflex "te," suggests the Hindi-ization of the loan word. In Pashto orthography, the equivalent word is Romanized by ALA-LC conventions as Paṣhtūn

their heterodox past, many in the community whom I met in Dubai had surnames associated with Hindu castes, as I note in Chapter 1. Furthermore, as a historically wealthy itinerant merchant community,[12] and given the prominence of the Dubai *imāmbārgāh* that the community operates, I noted that Khojas occupy elite status in the South Asian Shia community in Dubai. I explore this especially in the final section of Chapter 5.

Focusing closely on this site of religious activity, as a nexus for other forms of activity that my research subjects engaged in through their everyday lives in Dubai, I have developed through this research a picture of Shia experience more generally in Dubai. In Chapter 5 I trace some of the history of this community in relation to, and in tension with, the dominant conservative form of Sunni Islam practiced in the region, especially in Saudi Arabia. This form is alternately known as Wahhabism or Salafism, and often glossed as "fundamentalist" Islam. The overall Shia community is diverse, and internal breaks down between sub-factions (*Ithnā'ashari* and *Ismā'īlī*, Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, English-speaking). One community gathering site in central Dubai functioned to host large special events—especially marriages and funeral/remembrance services in the community—and thus fostered intermixing between sub-factions in the community. Since the Shia population overall is in a minority—and marginalized in ways I describe further in Chapter 5—some of my analysis about the interiorization of community activities can be ascribed to Shia experience generally in Dubai.

[12] I discuss this history of migration, especially in the Indian Ocean region, in Chapter 1. See further (Markovits 2008).

The overall size of the Shia community in Dubai, and the subset of South Asian heritage, is difficult to estimate. Official religious demographic census figures are not made public by the U.A.E. government, though some estimates indicate Shias comprise 15% of the native population.[13] The combined Indian and Pakistani population of the U.A.E. total approximately half of the total population, or 4.1 million.[14] Subtracting the roughly 500,000 Hindu population[15] largely from the Indian diaspora, we estimate 3.6 million are Indian or Pakistani Muslim. Assuming the Shia/Sunni ratio within this demographic approximates the ratio that exists in both India and Pakistan (10-15% and 85-90%),[16] I presume that roughly 450,000 Indian and Pakistani Shias live in U.A.E.

To quantify the community in another way, during my time in Dubai for this research, community members would be turned away at the imāmbārgāh's door on the nights *'Āshūrā* and *Ćehlum*, and *Imām 'Alī Shahādat* (Imām 'Alī's martyrdom anniversary) once capacity inside was reached. In South Asian venues, overflow crowds are usually accommodated in open space outdoor areas, often with the ceremony events projected and amplified via closed circuit television and speakers. The tradition of accommodating large crowds for major events in the religious calendar year extends from the general Islamic institution of the *'Īdgah* in South Asia, for instance—that is, a large open area reserved for once-yearly morning prayers on the occasion of *'Īd al-Fiṭr*. The limitations on Shias in the Gulf reflects the

[13] U.S. Department of State, 2011, "United Arab Emirates," *International Religious Freedom Report*.
[14] Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014, "United Arab Emirates," *World Data*.
[15] Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, 2012, "Table: Religious Composition by Country, in Numbers."
[16] Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2009, "Estimated Percentage Range of Shia by Country," *Mapping the Global Muslim Population*.

dominance of Sunni heritage in the native population, and anxiety about presumed political loyalties of Gulf Shia to the religious leadership in Iran (Louër 2008, 4). The overflow crowds also speak to the challenge community leaders face to expand indoor spaces to accommodate the growing community.

An outline to this dissertation

The chapters below each aim to tell a story that features a) a unique subset of key characters from the community, and b) a particular configuration of innovative social or religious action. Each chapter focuses on a unique quality of downtime experience that is effected by the ethics of worklife and religious practice, which I gloss as "efficiency" (Chapter 1), "excess" (Chapter 2), "aspiration" (Chapter 3), "anxiety" (Chapter 4), and "constraint" (Chapter 5).

Chapter 1 focuses on the preoccupation among a few research participants to invest actions and materials in everyday life and downtime with *fā'ida* ("benefit") or *ṣawāb* ("spiritual benefit"). While these ethics are aligned with the endeavor to be a good Muslim, they also channel energy from the imperatives and rhythms of work. One key participant—Nadim—worked a dangerous industrial job and often bragged about the risks he faced. The outdoor daytime work required vigilance and physical poise, and exhausted him. Still he helped lead a variety of initiatives within the Shia community to outreach to the broader Dubai community, including blood donation drives and food distribution to workers at outlying labor camps. I explore in this chapter how actions—regardless of their size and coordination—may be made beneficial, and how this spirit of downtime activity draws on the activity of work.

Chapter 2 focuses on the activities of a group of young working Pakistani men who pursue visceral religious experiences primarily through images, and secondarily at public enclosed gatherings. I examine how restrictions on the size and noise levels of public gatherings limit practitioners' ability to ritually perform *mātam*[17] in Dubai. Nonetheless, the readily available and accessible telecommunication technologies and infrastructures—as well as the rhythms, imperatives, and technologies of certain kinds of office work—allow for more pervasive presence and seamless integration of visceral images in everyday life and worklife, as compared to Pakistan, where live gatherings are popular, frequent, and widespread. The cheap availability of mobile phone and internet connectivity are a legacy of the flow of global production forces through Dubai, and reflect its entrepôt status. Similar to a theme I develop in Chapter 5 around sound production, "tastes" in bodily ritual performance correlate to assumptions about the social and class identities of individuals. In the polyglot South Asian Shia community I navigated in Dubai, some sought to limit their contact with these individuals, referencing their inability to control their compulsions—for both *mātam* and money. The chapter features portraits of two key individuals who cultivate an ethic of "managed excess" to engage with worklife struggles and with visceral religious imagery online.

Chapter 3 follows the quest for wealth among members of one small business. I focus on how members account for their business needs and goals monetarily, and examine the sense of desperation that pervades their downtime activities as their business perpetually struggles to turn a profit. In particular, I

[17] A Shia poetic form associated with rhythmic chest-beating.

examine how the group's leader draws on a wide network of kin and friends to secure various sums of money via loans: a quest that often destabilizes those relations. Given the climate of desperate striving to succeed in the migrant community, coupled with Dubai's "entrepreneurial" work ethic and history of informal lending structures, I explore how kin relations are monetized in Dubai, in ways that are seen to corrupt the ethical standards of the community particular to India and Pakistan. The ethic of "striving" they cultivate in their work, in other words, conforms downtime activities as well, and reworks and sometimes imperils kin and friend relations.

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the forms of downtime expression shaped by an environment of urgency. In Chapter 4, I trace various expressions of anxieties related to life in Pakistan, via stories tied to criminal and terrorist activities. Stories here draw together a chorus of anxieties—about lurking security threats and invisible regulatory forces—and take root in the emptied spaces of non-work. One late middle-age unemployed jobseeker narrated for me in vivid detail a traumatic abduction experience in Pakistan's unstable frontier region. In another conversation, situated against the foreground of a vacant sandy lot that served as overflow parking for a mosque, two low-wage workers considered parallels in the lurid details of unusual criminal events in Dubai and Pakistan. In one way, I suggest that the stories are grounded in vivid and verifiable details that builds on the imperative to obey rules in Dubai. More generally, I explore how the evacuation of space and slowed rhythm of life allows for an ethic of explorative rumination on painful experiences via storytelling. Through crime storytelling, I show how migrant

workers project anxieties about concealed crimes in Dubai onto memories of past first-experiences of violence in Pakistan.

Chapter 5 partly features the efforts of one religious poetry reciter—Saad—to adapt the styles and conventions of live performance to the demands of studio recording. I focus especially on his interactions in the studio with a variety of audio production engineers, or "recordists," and with other reciters. The demands of reciters' and recordists' day jobs leave very little time for studio work. Still, the ability to schedule recording times on occasional days off and overnight makes recording a more accessible and flexible activity than public performance. As with the *mātam* performances explored in Chapter 2, civic regulations in Dubai limit public gatherings where *nōḥē*[18] are performed. I explore how work demands and civic regulations in Dubai force religious poetry performance experiences into tightly-defined timeframes and contained interior studio spaces. I see an ethic of "constraint" here as a particular migrant mode of managing space and conducting one's life in light of regulations of space in Dubai. In my analysis, the drive to partition space is a migrant strategy of creativity and resourcefulness *consistent* with imperatives to contain and isolate both forms of noise and Shia religious activities, per civic regulations and police enforcement practices. Similarly, I explore how participants in the recording studio cultivated an ethic of disciplined creativity through the recording process. This included instances I noted where participants a) "riffed" on sung poetics lines, b) worked to ensure that recitations remained "non-

[18] Singular, *nōḥa*. A popular genre of elegiac Shia poetry in Urdu and Persian. *Nōḥē* commemorate the lives and deaths of the major Shia Imams. Elegies commemorating Imam Hussain and the major figures at Karbala may also be designated as *nōḥē*, though *marṣiya* is the more specific genric designation and subset for this).

musical," and c) improvisationally "partitioned" spaces designed for residential living, in order to create the studio itself.

At the center of each chapter is an effort to identify ethics of activity common across domains of life. Occasionally my informants directly described to me their motivations to act in certain ways. Still, the cultivation of such common ethics in each case, I argue, relied little on modes and spaces of "reflection." Rather, I found that gaps in the environment allowed them to *act* in ways consistent with other projects and struggles in life. Taken together, the chapters aim to show the central importance of emptied, austere, and highly-disciplined spaces for the cultivation of an ethics of activity embedded in everyday life.

1. Efficiency
benefit, intention, *fā'ida*, *ṣawāb*, *nīyat*

> *Indeed Allah does not wrong anyone even by a jot: if one does a good deed, He doubles it, and then from Himself bestows a rich reward.*
> (Qur'an 4:40)

I begin this discussion on forms of work and non-work efficiency by setting another scene from fieldwork. On a hot night in August, Nadim, Saad, Asgar and I sat in my car parked behind a central Shia mosque in Dubai, after Friday evening's prayer. With the engine idling and the A/C churning, our conversation turned to the global geography of Shia practice today, considering important and "beneficial" places of Shia pilgrimage:

> Saad: [listing places] "Karbala, Kufa; Iraq, Iran … "
> Nadim: "*fā'ida, fā'ida, fā'ida*." (Benefit, benefit, benefit.)
> Brian: "*Fā'ida*"
> Nadim: "You want to see *fā'ida*, no? Better *fā'ida*."

As Nadim talked, I pulled away from my parking spot, turning onto a side road. The engine revved up slightly, and Nadim continued:

> Nadim: "*fā'ida siyāra* (benefit/profit car) no? Your *siyāra* is *fā'ida* (profitable / beneficial) no?"
> Brian: "Ya I think so."

Driving a bit faster and turning onto the main road now, and the conversation shifted a bit:

> Nadim: *Kōn jārahāhē, Sharif kō* (Who is going to help Sharif tonight?)
> [Sharif is an another mutual friend]
> Saad: *Maiṅ aōr Brian jārahāhaiṅ.* (Brian and I)
> Nadim: *Asgar nahīṅ?* (Not Asgar?)
> Saad: *Asgar ziāda kar chukā, shām kī, hē na? Ziāda nahīṅ kiā, tumkī?* (Asgar did a lot of work last night, didn't you? Didn't you do a lot of work for him?)

They continued to discuss the situation of Asgar having helped with a food distribution effort, with some other members of the *imāmbārgāh* community, the night before. Nadim suddenly interjected a mocking reference to the person they helped. Asgar laughed, and then persisted, to Nadim:

> Asgar: "*Vo wālē kō … tum kō gāyē thē na? Vo wālē …* (That guy … you went there no? That guy …)."

Nadim continued to deny knowing the man they referred to, and his interest again seemed to drift away, looking out the window into the residential neighborhood. Just then Saad—a prominent poetry reciter in Dubai's Urdu-speaking Shia community—was perhaps also drifting, and started reciting a sung poem. I caught the first words:

> Saad: "*Mōlā dasht-e galān …. Yā mōlā dasht-e galān* (Oh master, the desert flowers)."

As Saad continued the poetic line, and we continued now down a busier commercial stretch of side road in the neighborhood near the mosque and *imāmbārgāh*, Nadim suddenly griped:

> Nadim: "*hum sē pata nahī, siyara vaḡ̲hēra ghūmnā ziāda achhā nahīṅ lagtā* (I don't know – I don't like this aimless driving on and on in the car.)"

After a pause in the chattering conversation, Asgar spotted a tea shop and asked me to stop. Parking in front, and turning off the engine, Saad abruptly excused himself, walked off toward his house. Nadim got out and stood outside the car to smoke a cigarette. Later a few more friends stopped by the tea stall; Nadim and Asgar engaged them in short conversations with them. After roughly fifteen minutes of

chatting, Nadim suggested he would walk home, and started off in the direction of his company accommodation. I drove Asgar to his room in a nearby neighborhood.

I begin with this anecdote about a central character, Nadim, and about the downtime practice of driving for young men in this community, as an opening to consider how Nadim and others conceive of the "beneficial" character of things, actions, time, and experiences in Dubai. In anticipation of my own impending departure near the end of fieldwork, I retained a rental car for a few months, in hopes of completing a variety of research inquiries. Recognizing its value, Nadim began to regularly refer to my car as "*fā'ida-siyāra*." The playful locution—an Urdu-Arabic mixture that translates as "benefit-car" or "profitable-car"—on the one hand affirms the car's importance. In the teasing context of the conversation, the locution also noted that while transported them around Dubai, I did not earn money like a taxi driver would.

But more specifically, I came to notice through long-term interactions with Nadim and his friends, that when ascribed to a thing or action, *fā'ida* usually implied its multiple overlapping beneficial functionality. In the final sections of this chapter below, I reflect further on our discussions about *fā'ida*-things that occurred, like the example above, during the "downtime" or after-work activities that I participated in. In reference to the car that I retained, its dual function lay in its benefit to me—to allow me to conduct research more quickly and efficiently—and its benefit to others—who I helped with their everyday tasks and obligations. Of course, lending assistance to them ultimately benefitted my own learning and research process as well.

For Nadim and other members of the Shia community working in Dubai, the pursuit of *fā'ida* (benefit) was entwined with pursuit of *ṣawāb* (spiritual benefit). Nadim worked a regular shift at his company in central Dubai, in industrial services, from early morning through mid-afternoon. He had a network of friends among the other workers with whom he shared the company camp accommodation, including a number of fellow Indo-Pakistani Shia. The camp was directly connected to the worksite via an underground tunnel. Between home and work, workers need not even set foot outside of the work-living environment. Yet despite the heat in summer and his labor-intensive outdoor work activities, he regularly made the trip (roughly a 20 minute walk) from his worksite accommodation to a Shia mosque in a nearby neighborhood for nightly prayers, unlike most of his friends. "God will give the *ṣawāb*," he declared to me, in English, as we walked one night from the main road to the mosque. His claim refers to the greater benefit that accrues to the individual who exerts the effort to attend evening prayer in public congregation at the mosque.

In this chapter, I explore how members of this community seek beneficial experiences, and how they valuate things and actions on the basis of the *fā'ida* or *ṣawāb* that they confer on the individual. The push to maximize benefit is partly a reaction to a particular sense of time and finitude in Dubai, I argue: the timeliness of industrial work routines and the general sense of impending disruptions, especially the potential loss of work and visa. Investing coordinated or purposeful actions with the energy to bear multiple outcomes, critically evaluating choices on the bases of *fā'ida* and *ṣawāb*, and foregoing and abandoning useless things and actions, are

constitutive of a strategy of efficiency. I trace the impact of the imperative to labor efficiently on the non-work and religious activities of working Shia in Dubai.

In doing so, I build on a variety of studies that consider the impact of "neoliberal" market forces on the practice of religion, and vice versa. In particular, some studies engage what Joel Robbins has observed as the "religious encompassment of development" (Robbins 2004, 100), to consider how a variety of religious practices become "rational," modern, efficient, and oriented toward utopian ends (Rudnyckyj 2010, 4; Bornstein 2005, 2-5; Ferguson 1999, 5; Meyer 1999, 214). Relatedly, ethnographic studies on Muslim entrepreneurs and merchants have sought to show how Islam and economic enterprise are "rationalized" together (Osella and Osella 2009; Sloane 1999; Stone 1974). Max Weber's perspective on the overlapping rationality of work and religious activity still dominates formulations in this field. In an attempt to find the roots of expanding bourgeois capitalism in Europe, he discovered an ethic particular to Calvinism—an ascetic form of Christianity—compelling followers to work hard and accumulate for "divine glory." For the Calvinist, Weber found, "Labour and Industry is their duty towards God" (Weber 1992: 106, 122).

In his introduction to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber attests to a focus on the influence of "religious ideas on the development of an economic spirit," and thus to "only one side of the causal chain" (Weber 1992, xxxix). My own approach in this chapter explores ethics of efficiency germane to both domains of work and religion. I am interested in their convergence and impact on the leisure-time activities of foreign workers in Dubai, but I do not suppose a simple

causal link between ethics of religious life and efficient actions of worklife, or vice versa. The intermixing and diffusion of ethics of efficiency into the environment of leisure-time supports my effort to see the forces that work on and through individuals less as top-down forms of power but as pervasive and lateral: as a form of capillary power in the sense developed by Foucault (1979, 198).

Key, then, to understanding the drive toward efficiency that I found among members of this working Shia community in Dubai are a few "environmental" aspects outside of the domain of work or religious life. I see efficient activity in Dubai as rooted in the particular *austerity* of Dubai's environment. A physical desert, the environment of Dubai for foreigners is also often one evacuated of immediate kin. Furthermore, the orderliness of roads and the austerity of the hospital clinic are key qualities of space that foster the cultivation of efficient activities, I argue. Each in their own ways, the central stories I narrate below draw on these qualities of spatial austerity and organization.

Industrial work: High stakes and mechanical efficiency

Nadim worked at a sprawling industrial site on the Arabian Sea in central Dubai. A large crane stood aloft high over the site, an omnipresence for those lived, worked, or traveled around it. The site was flanked on one side by a series of villas, a cluster of night clubs and high-end restaurants, and then a public beach: a large engineered expanse that cut a sweeping crescent into the coastline. As we bade Nadim farewell on that beach on the night before his departure and repatriation to India, we discussed his future, and the various comforts of home that belong to

another shore adjoining the sea in front of us. To our right, illuminated at night, was the crane high aloft in the background: a manifestation and reminder of what he was leaving behind.

Nadim had been perhaps my closest guide and occasional assistant in fieldwork in Dubai. He had come to Dubai five years earlier, initially on a three-year work visa, renewed for an additional two years. Like many I met in the Urdu-speaking Indo-Pakistani Shia community in Dubai, he was a *Sayyid* Shia. On official documents and on his social media accounts, he used as his surname the name of the Shia Imam and Prophet Muhammad descendent through whom his family traced their genealogical heritage. He had aging parents at home in Allahabad, India—a medium-sized city and historical seat of Urdu-language culture in north India—to whom he sent money. He sometimes described their anxiety at his being unmarried—a situation for which his other younger and married friends in Dubai would also occasionally tease him.

On our first meeting, in November 2011, he offered what I took as an early indication of his perceptiveness, and perhaps also feistiness. As I described the stakes of my research in the mosque courtyard, mentioning that it was part of my degree program, he interjected, "but what is the benefit for us" (*āp kē li'ē, kyā fā'ida?*). Later, as I wrote this dissertation and considered our interactions more holistically, I came to see this expression as part of his concern that actions be beneficial in multiple overlapping ways.

Nadim was employed by the Dubai government at a large public-private industrial services site. Midway through my research tenure in Dubai, he made an

attempt to transfer to a position with a private company operating at the site, drawing on his network of friends in the camp to pursue the position. Such positions were often coveted among the camp workers, one which would confer Nadim a higher wage, fewer hours of work per day, and greater flexibility to take time off. He complained also of never having been promoted in his current organization, in spite of his record of hard work and favorable reviews given by his supervisors and foremen. He viewed the job at the private company as a modest and reasonable promotion in light of his experience accumulated over four years in his current position. He was ultimately, however, denied the position at the private company, an outcome reflecting experiences of others in the broader migrant community that I observed, who failed in similar attempts to gain advancement opportunities. As a partial consequence, it seemed, he decided and abruptly announced three months later that he would return to India after five years working in Dubai.

Through conversations with Nadim and his friends, I began to draw a picture of the site's emphasis on efficiency and safety. One friend, Imran, worked as a compliance officer in the "environmental impacts" section. A character who I discuss further in the chapters below, especially in Chapter 4, Imran was native to Islamabad, and also claimed to be a *Sayyid*. In one conversation near the end of my fieldwork tenure, he described his family's background in law: his father and his sister were lawyers, and his grandfather had been a judge in the early days after Pakistan's independence.

To illustrate the congruence between waste management and profiteering, Imran gave me this description of his section: "This environment [the

environmental impacts section] as a rule follows the Dubai municipality. And it has very many contracts. And this environment also has a business in the Gulf: scraps selling, waste-iron selling, grid-selling. Very much selling." The imperative of his section to not merely properly process and dispose of waste—and to not merely follow Dubai rules or international standards for environmental protection—but also to *profit* from the sale of waste suggests an ethic of productivity and of efficient use of resources internal to their operations, and an aversion to wastefulness.

Waste-processing is frequently a component of "development" ideologies. In Western thought-systems, Vinay Gidwani and Rajyashree Reddy remind us how waste-processing is part of efforts to impose order over nature, building on a sense developed by John Locke that nature is wasteful. They explore the aversion of colonial managers in India to waste, and the ethic against "wastage" taken up by Nehru. As an inheritance of post-colonial development imperatives, Gidwani and Reddy also document a recent trend whereby "waste-picking" in Delhi has become increasingly structured and constrained by corporatized and mechanical "waste-management" enterprises: a network of garbage collection machines. The recent supremacy of the private companies owes partly to new remuneration structures for waste created by the municipal government: one that pays collection companies per pound of trash, regardless of its "use" value. The system in present-day Delhi diminishes incentives for pickers to operate and "segregate" useful items from useless trash (Gidwani and Reddy 2011: 1635-1637). By reducing the labor and time requirements for collection, the turn to bulk waste selling and mechanized collection aligns with development waste-management imperatives.

In Dubai, "bin cats" both regulate trash and provoke public scorn. The problem of stray cats in Dubai relates to the problem of abandoned cars: the left-behind trappings of hastily abandoned lives. I noticed far fewer of these animals in 2012 than I had in a pre-dissertation fieldwork trip in 2010, when I saw them regularly congregate around and inside public-use street-side garbage bins. As I passed an overflowing bin in my neighborhood one day in July 2012, with a friend from the Shia community, he noted that the stray cats which had been a regular fixture in neighborhoods and first-line regulatory force in waste processing, were now being "removed" in great numbers by the Dubai authorities. I couldn't verify has exact claim, though I found a description of one official program that involved capturing the animals, neutering them, and then returning them to streets. I take this as an example of the government employing efficient machines to contain natural forces. It also demonstrates the link between efficient work practices and the austerity of the environment: a form of mechanical efficiency which also aims to limit biodiversity.

Imran again referred to "waste" in a separate conversation about his career goals. He described how he had come to Dubai ten years prior to work at the industrial site, in order to support his family. Belonging to a family with many lawyers in Pakistan, he explained to me, he aspired to work in legal affairs or environmental regulation. However he was only able to secure a job in the environmental section after nine years working other jobs at the site. "I wasted the time," he told me, as he worried about his future and slow career development. When he further explained that he was uninterested in practicing law in Pakistan, I

asked whether he could pursue a law degree in Dubai, but he said he had "no time and no money."

Both Nadim and Imran discussed safety with me. Nadim described how safe working implied coordinating machines as efficiently as possible. Machines enabled the process of lifting and moving heavy construction materials, but only as an extension of deliberate and efficient human actions. Workers wore bright orange jumpsuits on the worksite at all times, and accessed the worksite from the camp accommodation buildings via underground tunnels to avoid the public street that separated the two locations, he explained. In this way, day after day, a worker would never have to leave the site. Leisure activities were directly incorporated into and structured by the worksite environment. The worksite was "home," and the environment was structured for the efficient management of labor.

I visited the accommodation camp on three occasions as a guest of Imran. A poster on a wall leading toward the tunnel, with a photo depicting a foreman in hardhat and white jumpsuit apparently giving directions to a variety of workers in orange jumpsuits and hardhats, read "Safety is your Highest Priority." On another occasion, Nadim described the situation of being accountable for his coworkers on the job, and the system of communicating with others in order to safely coordinate tasks, for instance, of keeping your coworkers "always in line of sight" (*hamēsha sāmnē mēṅ*) while moving around heavy equipment. The mantras of safe work-environment practices aimed to charge individuals with vigilance and responsibility for the safe and efficient functioning of the work environment.

Service, conservation, efficiency

Through key research contacts I developed in the immigrant community, I also explored ethics of work-efficiency related to Dubai's service economy. Sajdali was a prominent member of the Shia community who had pursued his career managing a restaurant in Dubai. Unlike Nadim, whose kin relations all lived in North India, Sajdali had a small family and long history in Dubai. Aging, and retired—though still an active leader and organizer in the community—he lived with his working daughter in a small and modest apartment in a desirable central Dubai location. His wife and mother were buried in a nearby Shia cemetery, where I visited with him one day, to leave sweets and give remembrances.

Sajdali belonged to the Khoja Shia community, whose members formed the leadership at the large and prominent *imāmbārgāh* in central Dubai, the locational nexus of my own research. His surname indicates his historical/ancestral affiliation with a Hindu *thakkur* caste native to Sindh. Through engaging him in conversations about the history of blood donation camps in the Shia community, I came to learn more about his own background in Dubai, and about the early Indo-Pakistani and Khoja Shia community. Having immigrated to Dubai in 1976, Sajdali was among the earliest emigrants I knew in fieldwork. Still, he described how the "original" Khoja Shias had arrived from Tanzania in Dubai in 1967, and had integrated themselves with other Indo-Pakistani Shias in Dubai—mostly Punjabis—who had already established an *imāmbārgāh* and were holding weekly *majlis* programs.[19] By the

[19] The *majlis* in South Asian Shia Islam refers to programs organized weekly, and on special occasions such as Imam birth and death anniversaries, which usually feature presentations such as *Qur'an*, *du'ā* (blessings), and poetry recitations, and an exegetical sermon delivered by an Imam or other religious

early 1970s, the expanding base of Khoja families began holding their own programs in their homes, and renting other shared gathering spaces for special events.

The Khojas are a historical trading caste and community native to the areas of India's western coast, Sind, and Gujarat. They originated in the fifteenth century as a sub-community of the "Satpathi" tradition: a highly "pliable" and hybrid community which "employed terms and ideas from a variety of Indic religious and philosophical currents, such as Bhakti, Sant, Sufi, Vaishnavite, and yogic traditions" (Asani 2011, 95-96; see also Devji 1987) Beginning in the colonial era, the Khoja community gained prominence as a highly itinerant Muslim merchant community in the Indian Ocean area (Markovits 2008, 78). Despite being identified as Ismaili community in the colonial era, in many cases they followed Hindu personal law—a legacy of their "syncretic" traditions (Mallampalli 2010, 1057). Amid heightened Hindu-Muslim tensions which animated the late colonial period, the historically-diverse Khoja community "gradually transformed" with a more-cohesive Shia Muslim population, as they became pressured conform their identity to communal norms (Asani 2011, 97). As I noted in the case of Sajdali, the heritage of Khoja's Hindu and Satpathi past is evident in the numerous surnames among community members in Dubai which are associated with Hindu castes and subcastes.

Many of the members I met in Dubai spoke Kutchi or Sindhi at home, despite having left India five or six generations prior, in addition to speaking Gujarati, Urdu, Swahili, Arabic, and English. The younger generation who had been born in Dubai

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leader. In Arabic, *majlis* also refers to the *place* of gathering, though in Urdu it is typically used to refer to the gathering itself.

generally spoke English as a first language, and had attended English schools in Dubai, though priding themselves in knowing multiple languages. Most of the Shia Khojas I met had immigrated to Dubai from East Africa. Most held Tanzanian citizenship for instance, while a few held Kenyan citizenship.

Sajdali immigrated to Dubai with the intention to open his own restaurant, which he managed with his wife until they retired in the late 2000s. Though I did not observe him in that work environment, many of our other interactions suggested to me the role of a restaurant-work ethic—in particular, one tied to service and efficiency—in his various non-work activities. In a variety of ways, for instance, he demonstrated a sincere commitment to food distribution as community service. Like Nadim and Hamdan (another prominent community member I introduce as a key blood donation camp organizer below) Sajdali was a frequent server of *niyāz* at the *imāmbārgāh*: a communal snack or light meal served immediately following a full *majlis* program.[20] Especially during the high-traffic mourning periods of Muharram and Ramadan, *niyāz*-service roles were keenly sought and sometimes hard to secure, as individuals hoped to accrue greater benefit (*ṣawāb*) through the practice of serving others in the community.

Some of Sajdali's other service efforts seemed aimed to cultivate strict efficiency. He extended his commitment to service at the *imāmbārgāh* to other assembly functions in the broader Dubai community. At his invitation I once

[20] In many Shia communities, *niyāz* is served and consumed as an "offering" to the Imams as a type of remembrance (D'Souza 2004, 198). For this community, even a small *niyāz* is served after each weekly *majlis* program. As a reference point, Platts dictionary offers "supplication," "inclination," "offering," or "dedication" as connotations of *niyāz*, while it defines *niyāz-ĕ-rasūl* as "offering of food or alms in the name of the prophet Mohammad." Platts, John T. 2003. "Niyaz." In *A Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī, and English*, 1164. Delhi: Urdu Academy.

accompanied him to a dinner at a large Shia private events venue, one that catered to events for Shia of various backgrounds in Dubai. The event marked the fortieth day of mourning following the death of a prominent elder Arab Shia businessman in Dubai. We arrived early at the event, and were met at the front of a large, visually-opulent gathering hall by the closest surviving male family members of the deceased, who were assembled in a row. Sajdali, dressed in a simple business suit, shook hands with each, proceeding down the line, offering condolences. Congenial with all, he seemed to know some better than others: he hugged and had a longer conversation with two men at the end. I followed Sajdali and offered condolences to the family members, then talked to a few other guests in the room, who had lived in England and visited the United States. Sajdali introduced me to a few more guests he knew.

As we passed a half an hour of talking and mingling with guests and family members, the room gradually filled with men. Then, upon making a brief announcement of thanks, the deceased's brother led guests to an adjoining banquet hall. At this time two other young men from the Indo-Pakistani community, who Sajdali had invited, appeared and joined us. We all then joined the others in the banquet room, where we were seated around large circular tables. Each table was overloaded with large platters of a variety of Arab and Indian-influenced dishes typical to the region's culinary identity. As we sat and ate, I talked to others about life in Dubai and again about travel in the West.

People ate quickly and mostly limited themselves to small talk. As they finished, men mostly dressed in white *kandūrahs* began filing toward the door,

leaving behind tables still piled high with food. If excess is a feature typical to Arab food presentation and service, Sajdali saw this situation as an opportunity. Appearing invigorated, he seemed to produce from nowhere a variety of plastic bags and containers, which he instructed me and his other guests to use to collect the remaining food. As we did, we were soon racing against the venue staff, who were themselves charged with cleaning up: disposing of the left-overs as trash and collecting the dishes. Sajdali asked if they could give us more time to collect the food, though they were constrained: their work schedules dictated the need for a swift cleanup.

Having collected as much leftover food as we could in the remaining time, we left the room carrying large trash bags filled with preserved leftovers, loading them and ourselves onto a back service elevator. Sajdali seemed gratified. We walked from the elevator down a dark corridor and then out onto a loading dock on the backside of the building. We then helped Sajdali load the food onto a small white van waiting for us there. As we loaded, he enthusiastically described his habit of attending events such as these and collecting leftover food. "They throw it away! We put it to good use."

An Arab woman dressed in a black *'abāyah* also joined us; her worn and partially torn clothing made her appear destitute to me. She sorted through some of our bags, and seemed to retain some items for herself, speaking loudly and authoritatively to Sajdali, in Arabic. In turn, Sajdali gave her curt instructions, but seemed to let her collect what she wanted. As she walked off with a few large bags, after we finished loading the van, Sajdali explained to me that she worked a

resource center in Sharjah for homeless and abused women, and would take the food there. The driver of the white van was also stood by, silently. I took him to be another contact in Sajdali's community service circle; he gave the driver instructions, after which he drove off with one of the young men who had joined us in the event. Sajdali explained the food would be delivered to the Sonapur labor camps: an outlying Dubai district housing many isolated labor camps for workers bussed daily to construction and industrial sites throughout the Emirate.

Sajdali then grabbed the two remaining bags, and brought them to his car. He explained that we would take these back to the *imāmbārgāh* and mosque. We drove off, and he described with satisfaction how he would also save some for himself to eat in the coming week. Sajdali appeared to relish his role managing the recovery and distribution of leftover food, and the opportunity to exploit his close connections with elite and powerful families in this community in order to serve others, to "efficiently" utilize the excess of others, and receive a benefit. His default role in this context, as in the context of *niyāz* at the *majlis* gatherings, was service.

One other instance, embedded in the routine texture of our interactions in everyday life, further conveyed to me Sajdali's commitment to strict efficiency. After trying for weeks to arrange a meeting with him to discuss his family history in Dubai and Tanzania, he finally agreed to meet me in his house. As we chatted in his kitchen, he turned to attend to a stack of unwashed dishes in the sink. He asked me, "Do you know how to use only one handful of water to wash an entire sink of dishes?" To demonstrate, he filled the top bowl with water and carefully scrubbed it, then let the water from it fall into the next cup, then scrubbed that and let the water

fall to the next dish, etc. He added a bit more water to a few other cups and continued the process. I watched, and he continued to wash, as we continued our conversation.

Concern for conserving water relates, in some obvious ways, to desert ecological realities, and also ties to forms of desert experience registered in both general Islamic practice and in Shia traditions. For required ablutions (*wuḍū'*)—performed before prayer, for instance—many research participants approvingly cited *ḥadīth*[21] guiding Muslims not to waste water. One day a group of men marveled as they showed me a YouTube video featuring a young man performing *wuḍū'* in what appeared to be a desert location, using just a handful of water. The deprivation of water is a prominent aspect of the ordeal that Imam Hussain and his faction faced at Karbala, in 680 AD—so much so that *piyās-e-Hussain* ("the thirst of Hussain") is a rallying cry at modern-day *imāmbārgāhs*. The water service area in the Khoja *imāmbārgāh* courtyard in Dubai is framed by a large banner which reads, in blood-soaked lettering: *PAANI PIYO TO YAAD KARO PYAAS HUSSAIN KI* ("Drink water, and remember the thirst of Hussain") which partly serves to remind people to generally conserve water resources (see Image 1.1). *Sabīl*—a roadside "shed in which water is kept for thirsty travelers" especially "during the festival of Moharram"[22]—is also a common male name in the Shia community.

Various anthropological accounts of gifting describe the diverse ways that surplus wealth—such as leftover food—may be "valued." The "potlatch" tradition of

[21] Sayings attributed of the Prophet Muhammad, taken as guidance distinct from—at times amplifying or conflicting with—the message of the Qur'an.
[22] Platts, John T. 2003. "Sabīl." In *A Dictionary of Urdū, Classical Hindī, and English*, 634. Delhi: Urdu Academy.

Image 1.1: Photo from the water service area of a Dubai *imāmbārgāh*, September 2012. Photo by author

Northwest coast Native American communities has been well documented by anthropologists, most famously by Franz Boas and further developed by Marcel Mauss (2000). In these communities, Boas argues, wealth (especially surplus wealth) is desirable in so far as it allows members to organize festivals where wealth is given away to other members, later to be returned with interest: the system known as "potlatch" (Boas 1897: 341-344). In George Bataille's interpretation, the benefit received by the giver is not the "inevitable increase of return gifts" but the "rank" conferred via the ritual itself: i.e. the public destruction of wealth. (Bataille 1988, 71).

I argue that Sajdali's act of giving away surplus food is a type of *a'māl*: a good deed that "enriches" the doer, and that may be quantified.[23] Nadim, who regularly assisted Sajdali in his food distribution efforts in Dubai, once remarked on the occasion of an *a'māl* program at the *imāmbārgāh* that he had no interest in attending. "My *a'māl* is good," he explained to me in justification. I argue that acts such as the distribution of excess food are a type of *a'māl*, and are structurally similar to potlatch, in that a benefit accrues to the giver which may be measured as a personal rank or status.

On the benefit of giving away surplus, Bill Maurer has also described how Muslim investors and portfolio managers may use interest-earnings from investments to make required yearly *zakāt*[24] contributions (Maurer 2005, 107-108). Since interest (*ribā*) is otherwise not allowed in Islamic finance, this is the only way that investors may reap its benefit, protect their wealth, and benefit others in the community who receive *zakāt* distributions. I see Sajdali's effort to conserve and efficiently use food and water as part of a broader attempt to align the pursuit of personal benefit with the greater benefit of the community. His approach to washing dishes and gathering food are both a) rooted in Islamic values and b) build on skills accumulated through years of mundane restaurant work and management, I argue.

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[23] As I describe further in this section, *a'māl* translates as actions or deeds and comes from the Arabic root *'aml* meaning work. In Islamic practice, *a'māl* activities are usually formalized rituals involving the repeated recitation of Qur'anic verses or other short phrases. Diane D'Souza compares *a'māl* to *ẕikr* in a detailed description of the practice among South Indian Shia. She also emphasizes the importance of "accounting" recitations toward achieving the desired "blessings" from God (D'Souza 2014, 173-186).

[24] An obligatory tax for all Muslims on income over a certain minimum, proceeds from which go primarily to the financial needy.

Donation camp design: religious duty, community service, medical care

Participation in blood donation, at sites organized by the Shia religious community leadership committee (the *jamā't* board), encapsulated for me the notion of accruing amplified and multiple benefit from a singular or simple action. The rise of "religious"-oriented participation in blood donation efforts[25] has been noted to coincided with the decline and growing disfavor toward remunerated blood donation, especially following the World Health Organization's declaration to achieve "100% voluntary non–remunerated donation of blood and blood components" worldwide by 2020.[26] For "religious" donors—as anthropological and public health research reflects, and as I explore in greater detail below—benefit can be construed in religious terms (see Copeman 2009, Martinez et al. 2014). Sajdali discussed with me the problem of blood donors' motivation in Dubai, explaining how the state hospitals formerly paid blood donors, in order to retain adequate supplies. Would-be donors who seek or expect monetary compensation remains a lingering problem for donation camps organized by the *jamā't*, he explained. The *jamā't* appeared to take this into account in their promotion of one blood donation event in 2012. An email containing information and a promotional poster for the event was captioned at the bottom with an intimation to prospective donors: "the fact that you're healthy and can do it is its own reward."

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[25] See Susie Turner, 2013, "Christians asked to give blood," *Christian Today*, June 11, http://www.christiantoday.com/article/christians.asked.to.give.blood/32838.htm; and "Call for Ramadan Blood Donation," *Iran Daily*, August 29, 2010, http://old.iran-daily.com/1389/6/7/MainPaper/3764/Page/7/MainPaper_3764_7.pdf.

[26] World Health Organization, 2010, "Towards 100% voluntary blood donation: a global framework for action," Geneva: WHO Press, http://www.who.int/bloodsafety/publications/9789241599696_eng.pdf.

Sajdali described to me the early efforts of blood donation among the Shia community in Dubai. One doctor, he explained, had organized a few camps in the late 1980s. Prior to that, a prominent Khoja Shia religious scholar in Tanzania had organized occasional blood donations in Mombasa, since the 1970s. The currently-ongoing blood donation programs were begun in 1998 by another key member of the community and the Khoja leadership at the *imāmbārgāh*.

Sajdali introduced me to this man, Hamdan, early in my fieldwork. A fellow member of the Khoja community, who had immigrated to Dubai from Tanzania, Hamdan's surname indicates his family's original ancestral membership in the Daivadnya Brahmin community native to Goa, India. Hamdan was in his mid-forties, and lived with his wife (also from Tanzanian Khoja community) and two young sons. He was employed as a medical technician at a local government hospital. By 2004 he organized donation camps during Ramadan gathering times as well Muharram, and a few years later—after the hospital's acquisition of a mobile blood collection unit (see Image 1.2)—he shifted the camps to spaces near the religious gathering sites themselves, in central Dubai. Over my research tenure, I developed a relationship with Hamdan, especially around these events. I attended two that he had organized: one at Muharram in early December 2011, and one at Ramadan in late July 2012. These events overlapped with the two biggest religious gathering events in the Shia calendar: the occasions of commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussain and Imam Ali.

In this section, I examine especially how Hamdan designed and "marketed" the events to the community, employing a language and logic of a) calculation and

Image 1.2: Dubai Heath Authority's mobile blood collection unit, parked in front of a blood clinic in Dubai, July 2012. Photo by author

equivalence, b) religious service to the broader community, and c) the work of delivering medical care. Like Sajdali, I found that Hamdan was frequently busy and hard to meet, with both work obligations and significant after-work "service" activities. He operated an email listserv for the members of the Shia community and posted a regular digest of community news updates, event announcements, for sale items, and ads for employment and housing. He maintained a high profile in the community by organizing and coordinating a variety of outreach campaigns, particularly those to serve the broader worldwide Shia community.

One initiative, for instance, mirrored Sajdali's effort to collect and repurpose leftover banquet food. Hamdan developed a service to collect people's unwanted left-over food from private religious events, in order to bring those supplies to people in need, for instance, laborers. A listing in one of Hamdan's email newsletters

advertised and described the service. A donator could call the hotline anytime, and "depending on the quantity" of food on hand, within "30-60 minutes" a team of volunteers would arrive to collect it. It was then immediately distributed to "poor and needy people" in Dubai, especially those at labor camps. I later observed multiple occasions on which Hamdan and Nadim, and occasionally Sajdali as well, would coordinate late at night to collect food and drive to the labor camps on the edge of the city like Sonapur—those predominately populated by South Asian industrial working men.

Hamdan's email digests each ended with the same benediction related to service: "may Allah (swt) bless us with a long and healthy life to serve others." Each was also framed by a different quotation from the Qur'an, Ḥadīth, or a saying of one of the Shia Imams. One email, for instance, featured an extended advertisement for Shia community members to give money to a *ziyārat sabīl* campaign: to support the provision of food and blankets to pilgrims, who commemorate Imam Hussain's march to Karbala in Iraq every Muharram (see the promotional poster, Image 1.3). The advertisement ended with a quote attributed to the sixth Shia Imam, Jafar Sadiq: "if someone goes for *ziyārat* on foot, for every step he takes, one virtue will be recorded in his name, one sin will be forgiven, and his level will be raised one degree." The statement implies the concern for efficiency and intention in *ziyārat*, which underlies the accrual of benefit. Something as routine and thoughtless as walking may be oriented toward receiving a reward—step by step—when the requisite intention is given.

Image 1.3: Promotional poster for *sabīl* donation campaign for Karbala *ziyārat*, circulated in Dubai via email, December 2012.

The statement attributed to the sixth Shia Imam above also correlates with a variety of verses in the Qur'an attesting to the outsized benefit of a good action. For instance, the Imam's accounting that each step achieves both a single benefit and the erasure of a single sin reflects a "doubling" logic suggested by a verse from the Surat An-Nisa ("The Women"): "Indeed Allah does not wrong anyone even by a jot: if one does a good deed [*hasanati*], He doubles it, and then from Himself bestows a rich reward" (Qur'an 4:40) A verse in the Surat Al-Ana'am ("The Cattle") presents a different accounting scale: while each good deed generates a tenfold reward, each bad deed (*sayyati*) generates a single "recompense" (*jazā'*) (Qur'an 6:160). Saba Mahmood also considers various accounting logics by which actions or rituals are evaluated as virtuous, as part of a broader discussion on the role of doctrine and to inform everyday pious practice among Muslim women in Cairo (Mahmood 2005: 96). With similar logic, one elder leader in the Shia community commented to me that the lesson of Islam is not to avoid sin, but rather to be aware of the sin, and to counter that action with good deeds: a logic he used, in the context of our conversation, to justify transgressive sexual experiences.

All actions—*a'māl*—may be implicitly valued as conferring "merits" or "detriments." *A'māl* also connotes as the sum of good deeds (*khīrān*) figured against bad (*shirān*), are the rewards that God will give the follower, both in this life and the next. For instance, Platt's Urdu Dictionary defines *a'māl-nāma* as the register of one's doings or conduct; the register in which the deeds of men are supposed to be recorded (Platts 1884, 61). In my data analysis for this dissertation I discovered an image posted on an Islamic online digest that served

as a guide to "the 5 things to weigh" (5 *waznī ćīzēṅ*) in making a "Naama-e-aemaal," which included a graphic depicting a legal scale (see Image 1.4).

The Khoja Shia community in Dubai organizes *a'māl* programs on the fifteenth night of important months: programs that feature the repetitive recitation of specific Qur'anic verses as a congregation. Participation in such programs is designed to improve the *a'māl* of the individual. As I mentioned in the previous section above, Nadim regularly chose to avoid these programs, contending that his *a'māl* was already "good" as a consequence of the good deeds he regularly performed in the community. His preference implies a view that *a'māl* is better when it is motivated by personal conviction rather than ritual obligation.

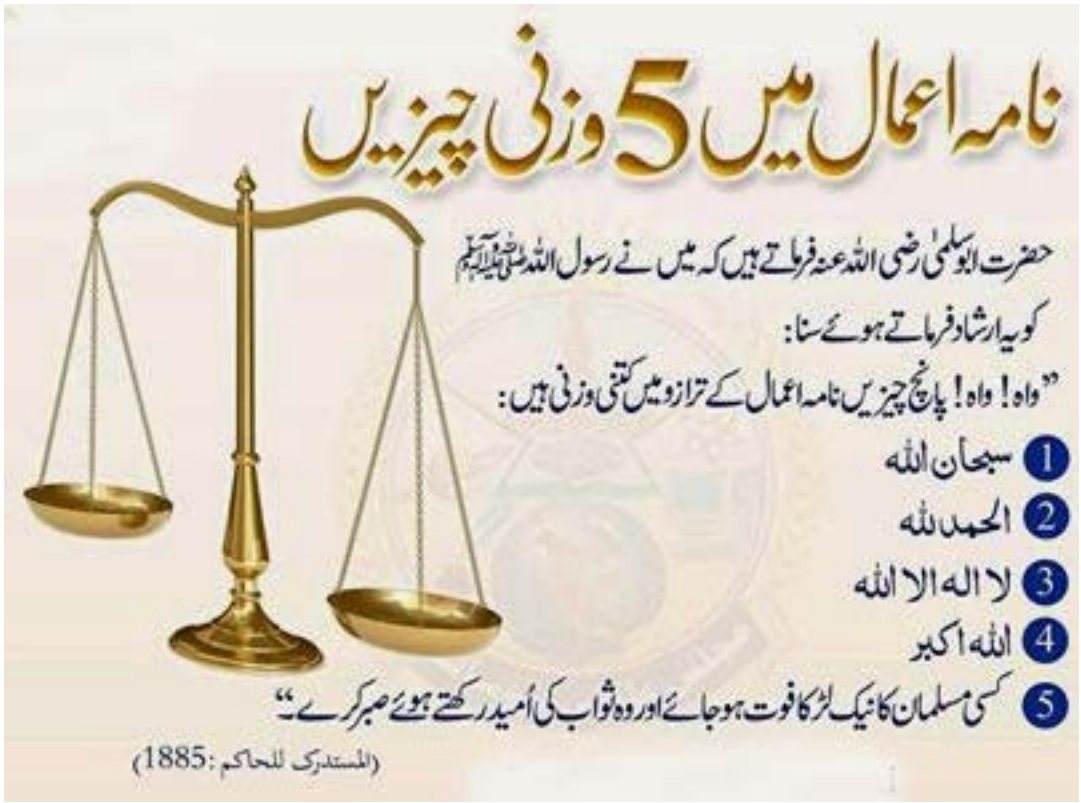

Image 1.4: The heading at the top of this informative poster translates as "5 things to weigh in recording *a'māl*. Image available online [accessed October 27, 2016]: http://rameenislam.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Naama-e-Aemaal-May-5-Wazni-Cheezay.jpg

The logic that good actions in everyday life—like giving blood—will have an outsized benefit or reward (in the next life) is further suggested in the promotional material for blood donation camps. I entered fieldwork in late 2011 unaware of the role of blood donation as a form of religious service. Three months into my research, while attending a majlis on the eighth night of Muharram in Dubai, I stumbled upon a camp that was set-up in a vacant lot adjacent to the *imāmbārgāh*. Approaching, I noticed the large vehicle specially designed for mobile blood collection, that bore the Dubai Health Authority's branding on its side. The side of the unit was also adorned with an inspirational message: "one drop of your blood can save a life" (see Image 1.2). Though I did not attend the Muharram blood drive the following year, Hamdan emailed me the poster he used (see Image 1.5). The email he had circulated to his listserve contained another reference aimed to convey the outsized benefit attached to the act: "It means a few minutes to you but a lifetime for somebody else."

I walked up to the sign-up table, where a few young men were adding basic identification information on a form, which had been prepared by the *jamā't* in order to tally participants. The top of the form was captioned with another phrase of inspiration, attributed to the Qur'an. The metonymic logic fit that of the Dubai Health Authority's promotional language, while expanding the scale: "to save one life is to save all of humanity." In these messages, one drop of blood and a "few minutes" of your time are weighted with great purpose and utility. The Qur'anic reference aimed to further persuade the potential donor of his or her impact, with the reminder that a small act can save humanity.

Image 1.5: Promotional poster for Muharram 2012 blood donation drive in Dubai, circulated via email December 2012.

In addition to these efforts to configure blood donation as a religious duty, I argue that the promotional materials aimed to draw the donor into a relationship with recipient, and thus into an act of medical care. I see this as an effort to connect blood donation with blood transfusion, as part of a singular process. As a medical technician, Hamdan's hospital work drew him regularly, though indirectly, into the process of administering medical care to patients. He leveraged his connections within the Dubai Health Authority and his medical-technical expertise in designing and leading the blood donation camp efforts for the community: organizing the staff and reserving the mobile unit, for instance. Furthermore, the promotional email he posted to his listserv contains a note about the various uses and destinations for the banked blood: "Thalassemia patients … road accident and burn victims … patients with neonates and maternity health complications … cases diagnosed with cancer or scheduled for open heart operations." By inviting potential donors to reflect on specific patients types, and even on particular accident scenarios, Hamdan effectively aligns would-be donors and the potential recipients of their bodily "gift," configuring the donor as a participant in the administration of care. In these ways, I see Hamdan's interest in aligning religious service with medical care as part of his own comprehensive commitment to "service," which builds on aspects and imperatives of his employment in medical technical services.

Intention underlying benefit

To critically evaluate the particular benefit sometimes ascribed to Shias who donate blood, beyond the general values of religious and civic service that I outlined

in the section above, I must first discuss in greater detail the process by which such benefits are secured. In general, in Islamic practice, *nīyat* (intention) is closely tied to the accrual of *ṣawāb* (spiritual benefit). Specifically, the extent to which the practitioner receives spiritual benefit from any action is largely the extent to which they establish "intention" prior to the action. *Nīyat*, for instance, includes the requirement that the practitioner organizes their heart or mind prior to engaging the Qur'an, via text or recitation. Shias, such as members of this community, then extend this requirement to the handling, recitation or audition of *kalām*: a shorthand reference to all types of Shia religious poetry. *Kalām* translates as "speech," "language," or "words," while *kalamat Allah* means "the word of God," or "Holy Scriptures."[27]

Given the saturation of the environment with things and utterances that may contain *kalām* or Qur'anic text, encountering them without having given the necessary intention is an abiding problem. One evening, while sitting in my car with Asgar in front of a tea shop, as we waited for other friends to join us, I turned on the car's radio. It tuned in a channel playing continuous Qur'anic recitation. After a minute of listening, Asgar suggested that I turn off the station, indicating that it is not good to listen to Qur'an recitation while distracted. In other words, it is improper to encounter the words without having given the requisite intention and performed the requisite body purifications (*wuḍū'*). On another occasion, I rode in a car with a friend, Muhammad, from the community shortly after the conclusion of evening prayer. Sunni mosques perform the prayer slightly later than Shia mosques,

[27] Wehr, Hans. 1994. "Kalm." In *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 981-982. Urbana: Spoken Language Services.

and along the route a few prayer leaders were still reciting Qur'an aloud to members of their congregation, having finished the required parts of the prayer. As we passed one such mosque that still had it's speaker open, broadcasting the recitation to the public areas outside, the driver turned to me, exclaiming, "I wish these mosques would not keep their microphones open for the prayer and recitation. We don't know what to do when we hear this—should we stop?"

Of course, acts of waiting and of driving are themselves intentional, functioning to achieve the outcomes of reuniting with friends and reaching a destination. However, encountering or *hearing* the words of the Qur'an without actively *listening* (i.e. without "intending" to listen; without giving *nīyat*) introduces a quotient of inattentive action. Upon hearing the words, the underlying action—driving or waiting—is suddenly no longer fully intentional. Some expenditure associated with being in and sensing the world, and undertaking a mundane activity, is now wasted. In this way, the efficacy of the action is aligned with its efficiency. If inefficient, it is no longer effective: hence Muhammad's suggestion that perhaps we ought to stop and listen to the Qur'an recitation wafting out from the mosque, before continuing our journey. This conception of efficiency relies again on the understanding that mundane actions are often central component of the pursuit of spiritual benefit, as demonstrated in the notion of *ziyārat* described in the previous section.

Shia participation: blood donation as religious performative act

As I aimed to describe in relation to donation camp design above, I believe that Hamdan encouraged participation in blood donation as a general form of Islamic service to the broader community, and as a form of participation in medical caregiving. When I asked him directly, he denied and expressed some discomfort with a further "valuation" of the blood donation ritual as a substitute—materially and corporeally—for other forms of "blood-letting" via self-injury that many Shia engage in to commemorate Imam Hussain's martyrdom, to remember and feel his pain. Yet examples abound worldwide that attest to the participation of Shia in blood donation as synchronous with the primary times of commemoration in the Shia calendar, and attest to individuals and organizations even urging fellow Shia to "substitute" blood donation for acts of inflicting self-injury.[28] In this way, blood donation fits into the wider critique of blood-letting in Shia rituals, in part as a consequence of Ayatollah Khamenai's influential 1994 *fatwa* that describes the practice as anti-Islamic.[29] Often, and importantly for the stakes of this chapter, the call to forego ritualized self injury encourages individuals to instead make "useful"

[28] Schubel (1993), Zahab (2008), and Madsen and Hassan (2008) describe the organization of blood donation camps in Karachi in the 1980s and 1990s, partly instigated by a Shia student organization encouraging fellow Shias to donate blood as a substitution for flagellation. Schubel and Zahab both stress that the camp participation did little to diminish participation in ritual self-injury. Norton (2005) and Deeb (2005) both describe how Hezbullah encouraged and helped organize large blood banks on the occasion of ʻĀshūrā in Lebanon, beginning in the 1990s. A 2013-2014 medical case study based in Srinagar, India explores the underrepresentation of females at voluntary blood banks, but nonetheless notes the outsized contribution of Shias, particularly on ʻĀshūrā, suggesting that "these are unique opportunities available for limited blood banks throughout the world" (Bala, Handoo, and Jallu 2015, 188). Others describe instances of flagellation critics in Ladakh encouraging Shias to donate blood (Pinault 2001), the Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization dispatching collectors throughout the country on ʻĀshūrā, and ultimately collecting 3.5 times more blood nationwide on that day than the national daily average (Abohghasemi et al. 2011), and a recent blood bank organized in New York (Madsen and Hassan 2008).

[29] For a broader discussion about the debates over these rituals inside Shi'ism, see the chapter "Spurting Blood and Attempts to Regulate Ritual" in Pinault (2008).

(Pinault 2001) and not "waste" a "scarce" bodily resource (Madsen and Hassan 2008).

The enduring centrality of pain in modern Shia experience relates to the real connection Shias feel, effect, and represent to the *Ahl al-Bayt*, and thus to the pivotal experience of Hussain at Karbala. Names such as Gulam Ali—meaning "slave of Ali" in Urdu—and Bande Abbas—meaning "friend of Abbas[30]"—are common in the South Asian Shia heritage community. The claims of certain Shias to genealogical descent through one or more of the original Twelve Imams reflects the closeness Shias feel to the Prophet's family and progeny. *Sayyid* Shias often keep detailed records of their genealogies—as a *shajara* or "family tree"—in their homes. One who I met with in Dubai carefully kept a copy of his with him, while leaving the original in his home in Pakistan. He displayed it for me one day when we met (see Images 1.6-1.9).

For Shias then—among other Muslims, and among anyone who hears the story—the bare facts of Hussain's treatment at Karbala, and the deaths of innocents such as many young boys and Hussain's own infant son Abbas, as commemorated in oratorical sermons and oral poetry performances in South Asian Shia traditions, elicit pain. Weeping, striking one's chest or head with hands, and striking one's back with blades, lie on a continuum of emotional and sorrowful response to hearing poetry evocative of the experience of Hussain and his faction. Wounds on the flesh of the modern Shia body are a point of transference, linking the destruction of the

[30] Abbas was the infant son of Hussain, struck by an arrow and killed at Karbala.

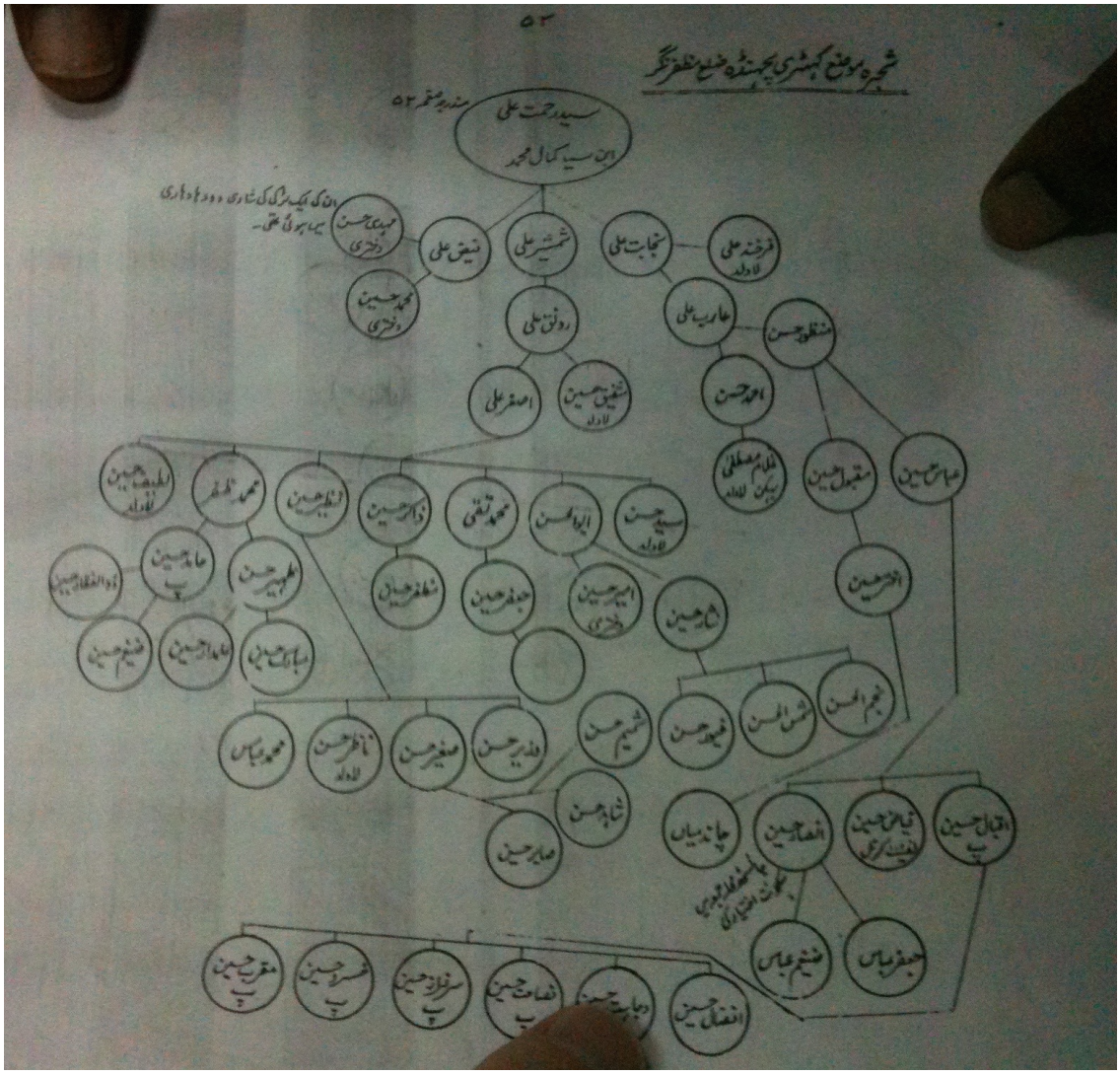

Image 1.6: Photocopy of *Sayyid* shajra (genealogy) from a published source, displayed by research participant in Dubai, August 2012. Photo by author. The tree traces male descent only. The title at top of the page reads, "Genealogy, Village Kahetry, District Muzaffarnagar".

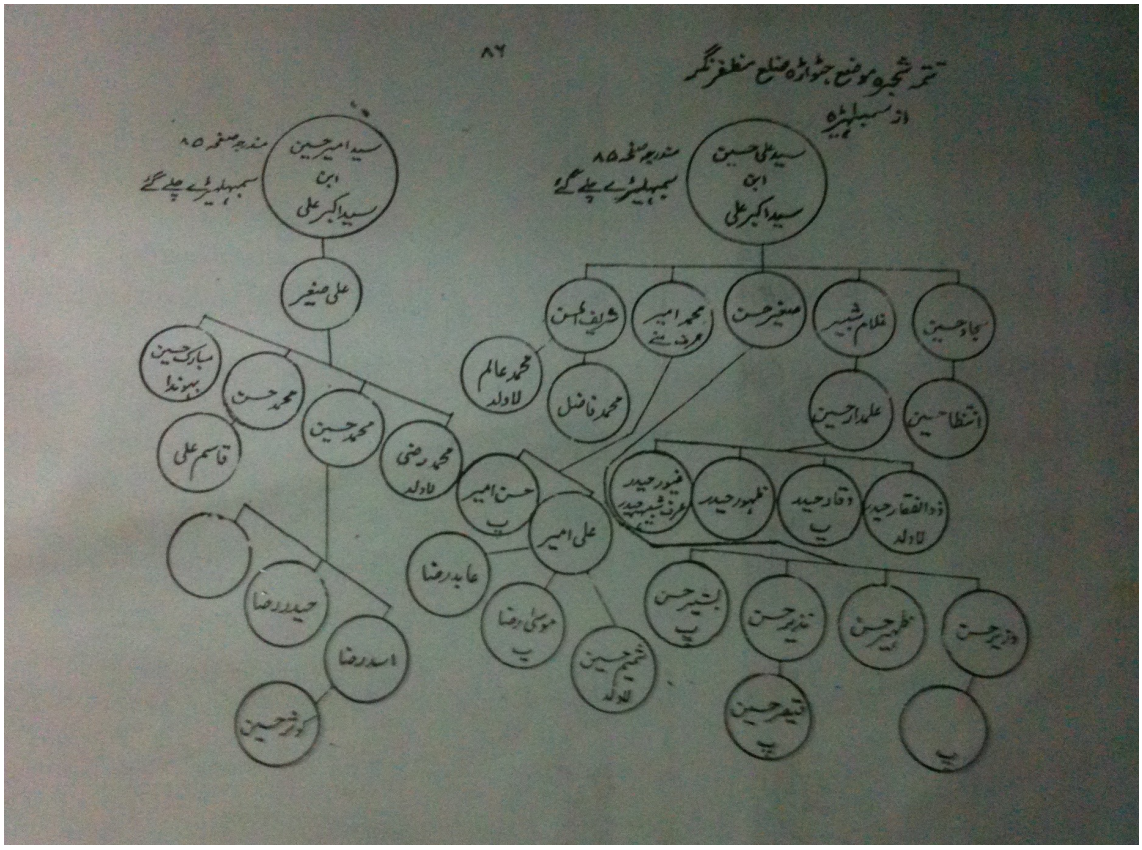

Image 1.7: Another page from the same publication, through which the research participant also traced his genealogical descent. Displayed in Dubai, August 2012, photo by author. The title reads: "EndVportion genealogy, village Chitwara, district Muzaffarnagar."

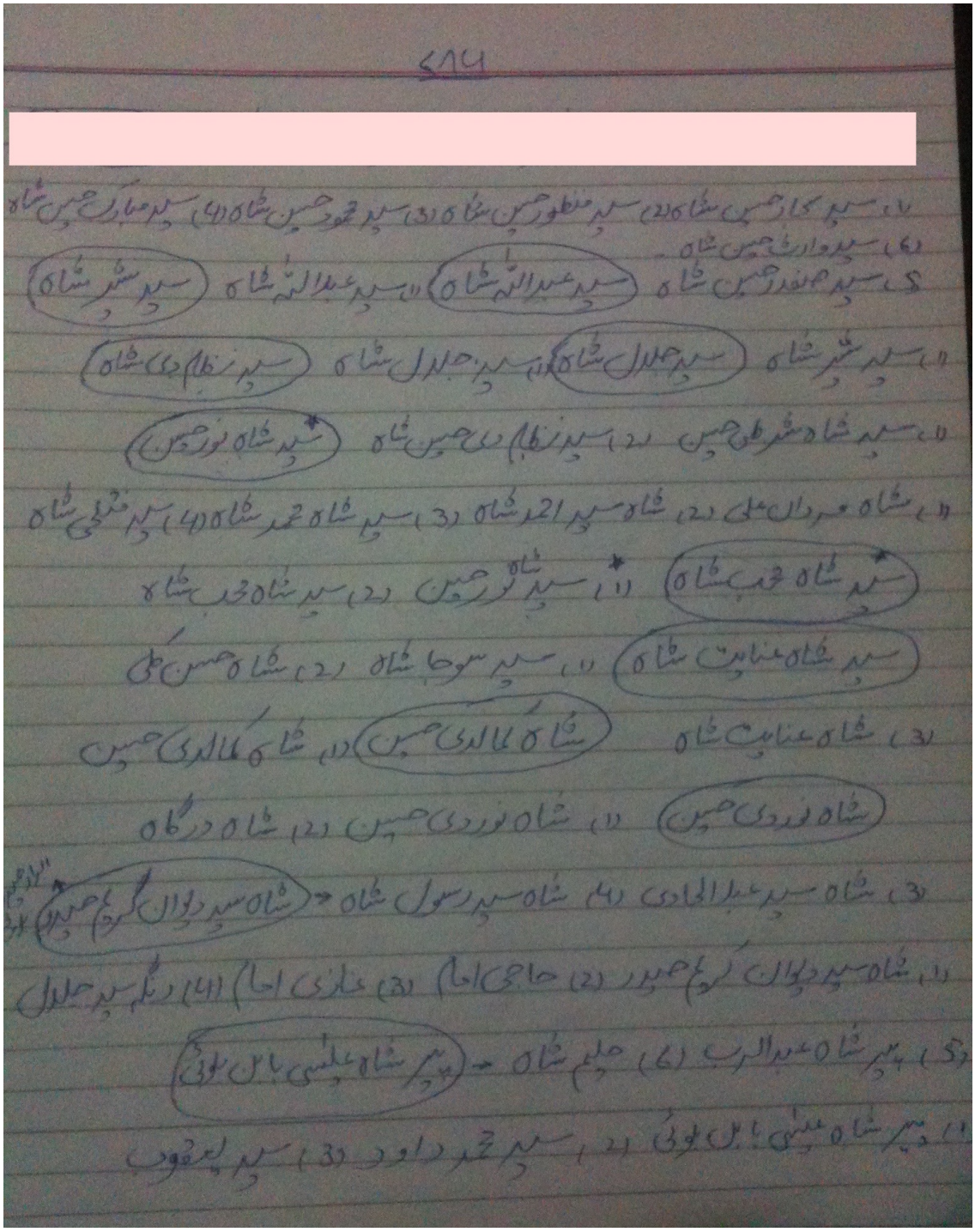

Image 1.8: The first page (of four total pages) of participant's handwritten genealogy, and extention of the published genealogical tree. The first line (obscured for privacy) begins with his own name, then his father's name, and continues through male relatives. Displayed in Dubai in August 2012, photo by author.

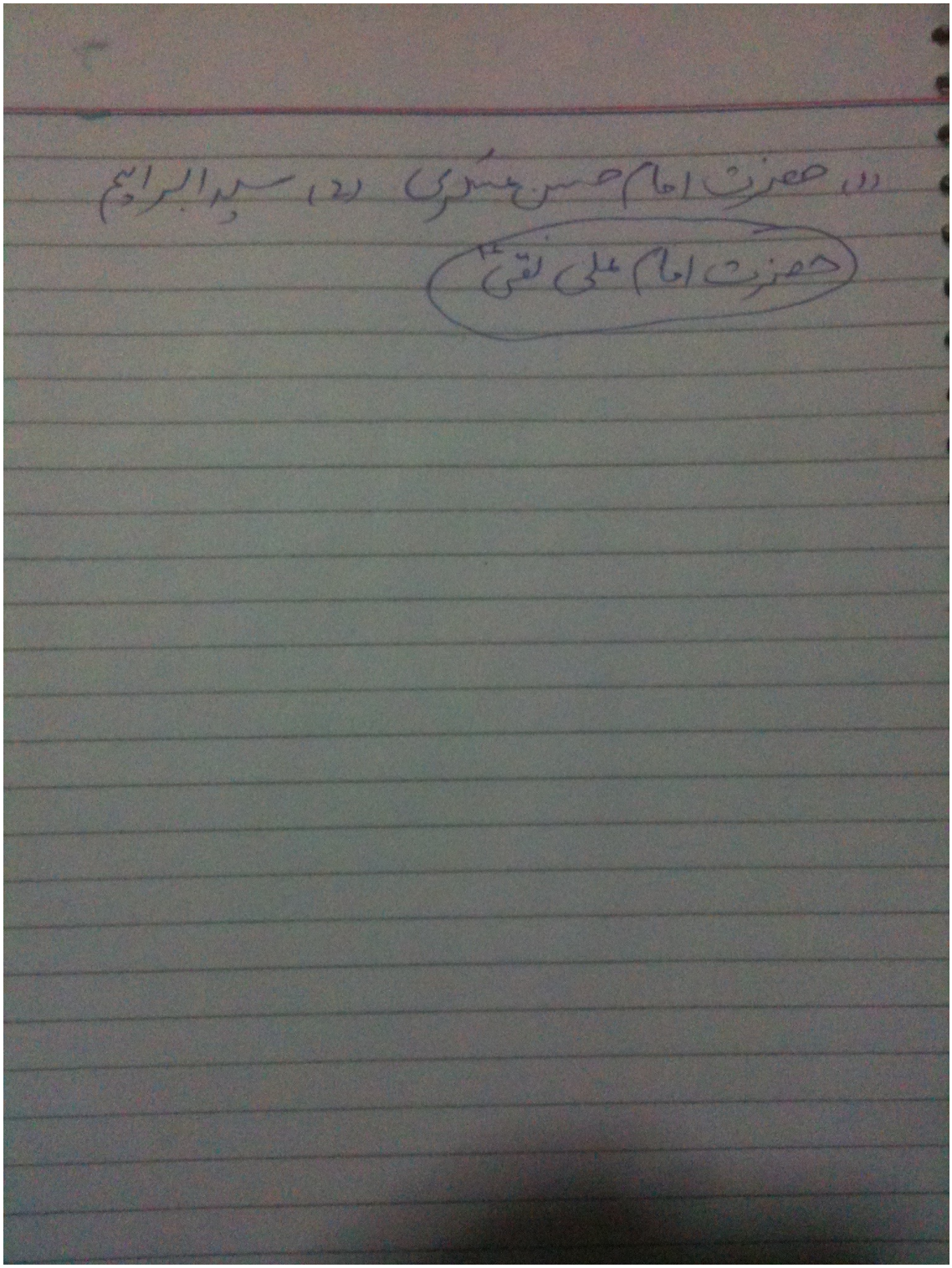

Image 1.9: The final page of the participant's genealogical notebook. The final entry in the long linear chain of male names, circled in the above record, is "Hazrat Imam Ali Naqi:" the name of the tenth Imam recognized in this branch of Shia Islam. The genealogy establishes in written record the participant's *Sayyid* identity. Displayed in Dubai, August 2012, photo by author.

"Hussainīyat"[31] bodies on the battlefield at Karbala with the feeling of pain conjured by its recollection in the present-day.[32] I thus suppose that the discomfort for Shias who would donate blood as a "substitute" for a religious act lies not with making blood-letting efficient—i.e., productive in multiple ways—but rather with making commemoration restrained.

Hamdan's discomfort with the valuation of blood donation as an expression of protest of the fate of the Imams may seem incongruous with his broader commitment to efficiency, and furthermore with other "efficient" Shia practices such as the conservation of water in the name of Hussain, and the community's organization of *aʿmāl* programs. Still, I propose that such incongruity in fact reflects a central tension within Shi'ism practice today broadly between the ethics of conservation and excess. Efforts to conserve water at *imāmbārgāhs*, organize *aʿmāl* programs, and to align blood donation with the commemoration of martyrdom, clash with forms of "excessive" self-injurious activity and the pursuit of visceral images and experiences (as I describe further in Chapter 2), and with aspects of religious poetry performance, including the overproduction of sound (as I describe further in Chapter 5). The tension between Shia practices that tend toward conservation and those that tend toward excess serves in part to divide people on the basis of "tastes," into subgroups within the diverse Shia community in Dubai—divisions I explore further in the next chapter. However I argue that the tension also

[31] A locution implying the cult of personality surrounding Hussain.
[32] Others have stressed that self-injurious forms of *mātam* are essentially not "painful" experiences, as participants attest to feeling no pain while performing it. While members of the Dubai Shia community made similar claims to me, *mātam* cannot be separated from the broader range of *majālis* performances in which they are immersed, which include collective weeping, loud wailing, and non-rhythmic chest striking. These vocalizations and bodily actions express grief at the recollection of details of the Hussainīyat experience at Karbala, during *marṣiya* and sermon performances.

manifests as multiple competing impulses internal to many individual members, such as Hamdan and Sajdali, who on the one hand apply a standard of strict efficiency to everyday actions—such that those actions bear multiple outcomes—but also actively organize and participate in mourning programs, where they weep openly and recite poetry.

Visual symbolism contained in the blood donation materials and in the mosque environment also suggest the tension. Consider, for instance, the presentation of the message "Drink water, and remember the thirst of Hussain," in the sign in Image 1.1. The blood-red letters seem to ooze blood, conjuring the image Hussain's bleeding on the battlefield, and of participants in self-injurious mātam. In contrast, consider the pure containment suggested by the image of the oversized drop of blood, in the blood donation promotional and informational materials, in Images 1.10 and 1.11 below. Here, the tension between conservation and excess is rendered in discrete properties of a liquid, to either spill or conform as droplets.

As a further spatial manifestation of this tension, I noted the "emotional" disconnect between the blood donation camp and the *imāmbārgāh* in late 2011 Muharram gatherings. The *jamā'at*'s donation camp sat adjacent to the central Dubai *imāmbārgāh* in the corner of a vacant sandy lot, frequently used at other times by migrant men and boys for impromptu cricket games, and on gathering nights for overflow parking. As I described above, the donation camp space was marked as religious with use of Qur'anic passages as inspirational slogans on the sign-up forms. The metonymics of the singular contribution—one drop of blood, one moment, one life—aligned the Qur'anic message with the Health Authority's promotional

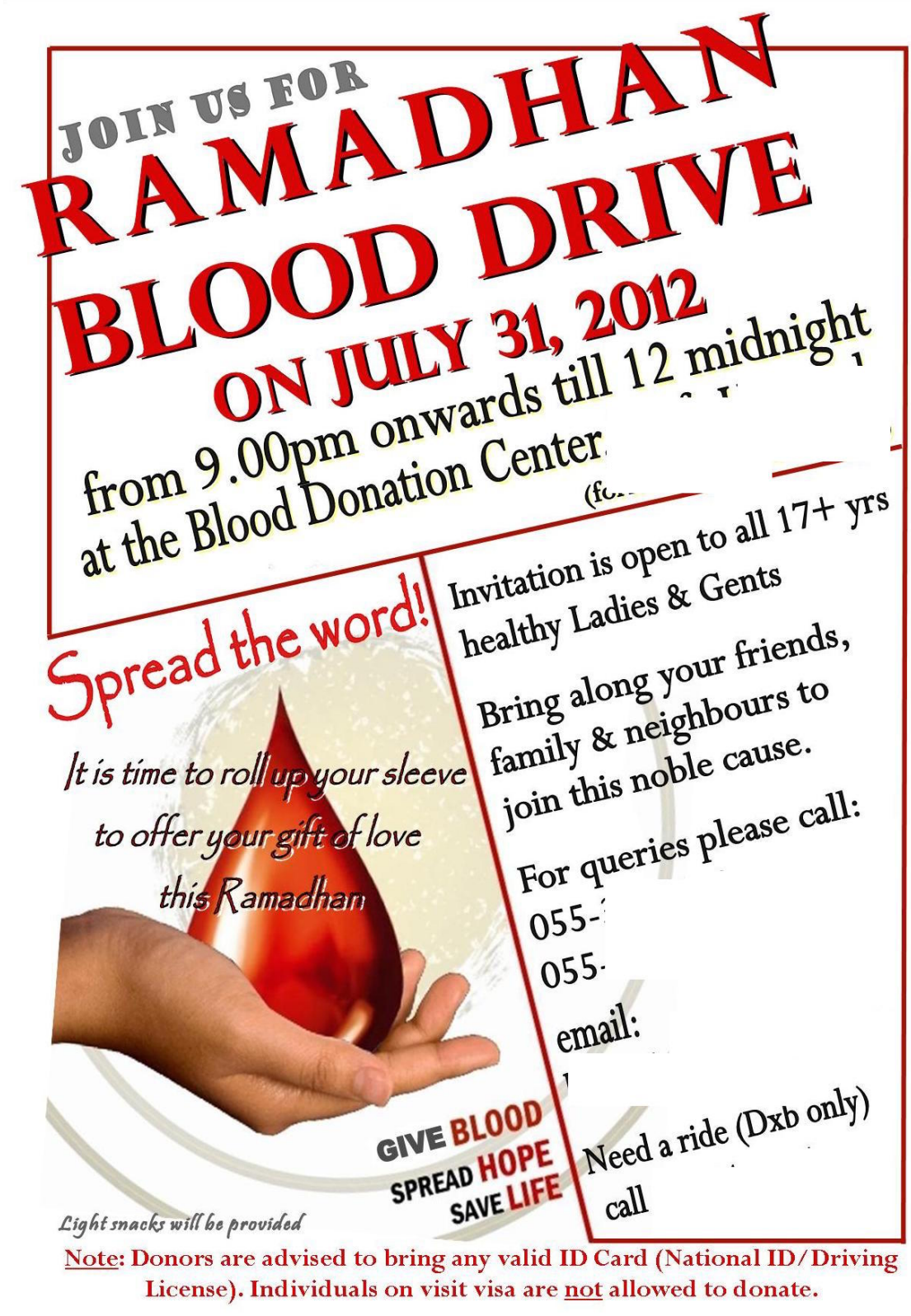

Image 1.10: Promotional poster for Ramadan 2012 blood donation drive. Circulated via email in Dubai in July 2012.

Image 1.11: Mission statement plaque on the wall of the waiting room in the Dubai Blood Donation Centre, July 2012. Photo by author

message. Still, the camp was absorbed into the ambient space and energy of downtime activities. Men shared jokes with each other. I talked to one British-Indian emigrant working in Dubai who described blood donations back home in Manchester, but our conversation also turned to mundane aspects of work and life in Dubai. The emotional energy of the *mātam* performances, and the poetic language of Karbala, pain, and sacrifice, were contained in the enclosed areas of the imāmbārgāh nearby, where performances were ongoing. Despite the proximity, aspects of the emotional ritual experience of *mātam* performance were foreclosed from the donation site.

Vernon Schubel, a scholar of South Asian Islam, has given an alternative ethnographic account of Muharram-linked blood donation, describing an early camp organized by the Hussaini Blood Bank in Karachi in 1983:

> On the tenth of Muharram, a blood bank is setup in the imāmbārgāh. The blood is drawn and typed right at the imāmbārgāh. In fact, it is drawn in the *ghusl khanah* [wash room] and then typed in the same field where the *zanjir ka matam* [self-flagellation ritual] is performed. The typed blood is then distributed free to Shi'i hospitals in Pakistan … (Schubel 1993, 150)

The more obvious spatial mixing of *mātam* and blood donation activities in this example suggests an attempt to associate the two activities, Schubel suggests. Yet he goes on to question the successful substitution of one action for the other. Though the camp had recorded 200 donors by noon on *ʻĀshūrā*, he explains, those activities were offset by the 600-700 people who had completed injurious *mātam* at the *imāmbārgāh* (Schubel 1993, 150).

In Ramadan 2012, the Khoja Shia *jamāʻt* board asked Hamdan to shift the donation effort further away from the *imāmbārgāh* area. (I later found out that in Muharram 2012, the donation camp was again organized adjacent to the *imāmbārgāh*.) They explained that it drew too much foot traffic around the gathering center, an area that was regularly patrolled by the Dubai Police for noise and other public nuisance disruptions. Hamdan organized the Ramadan blood donation effort at the blood collection center at the public hospital where he worked, about 5 miles away from the *imāmbārgāh* via a series of highways. Nadim offered to help Hamdan organize rides to the center with various other community members who had cars (see also the promotional poster, Image 1.10).

Though the same mobile unit sat idle outside the blood clinic, the blood extractions were undertaken inside the clinic itself. I noted a prominent Mission Statement displayed on one wall, which emphasized attributes particular to the medical processing of blood, for instance: "service," "care," "safety," and "timeliness" (see Image 1.11). I arrived before any others, and watched as a slow flow of mostly men began to arrive in cars, emerging in small groups. Nadim and Asgar arrived together later, coming from the Majlis. They explained that, despite their efforts, they had found few recruits for the blood drive. By the end of the night, I counted twenty-six names on Hamdan's sign-up list.

The blood drive was organized on the twelfth of Ramadan, exactly one week before the first *Shab-e-Qadr* night recognized by Shias: a night which commemorates the first revelation of Qur'anic verses to the Prophet Muhammad, and on which Shias also commemorate the moment when Imam Ali was fatally struck by a sword in Kufa, Iraq, while praying in a mosque. I asked two of the initial blood donors at the hospital why they donated, and both mentioned *k̲h̲idmāt* or "service." When I asked if Imam Ali's death commemoration was a motivator, they smiled but shook their heads, denying an association with their act of service and Ali. They seemed a bit uncomfortable with the suggestion.

Nadim declined to give blood, but he and I and a few others walked back in the clinic's collection area with Asgar, as he was admitted in by a nurse. Nadim seemed uncomfortable with prospect of giving blood, but Asgar, a tall and soft-spoken man in his early twenties, sat confidently and calmly in the chair as the nurse prepared for the extraction, confirmed his medical details and asked

questions about his health. Nadim asked the nurse questions about the procedure, and teased Asgar a bit, asking if he was anxious. Asgar reacted little as the extraction proceeded; he squeezed a ball to aid the process, and smiled and joked with us as we waited.

After the procedure finished, and we returned to the lobby, we chatted in a small group. I asked Asgar about his motivation for donating. He also mentioned *k̲h̲idmāt* and about receiving *ṣawāb* for his act from God, which the others affirmed. When I asked about the relevance of Ali's martyrdom, he also smiled as he paused to consider the question, and then conceded that yes, he was also thinking about Ali. Another spoke up: "some people will give *nīyat* to Ali, before the injection… They will say 'ya Ali,' like that." Intention could be conveyed verbally or non-verbally, another offered. "*Bas, yād rakhnā is sufficient. 'I think of Ali …'"* Nadim added, demonstrating ways that *nīyat* could be reasonably established. Asgar then clarified to me that he had given *nīyat* to Ali by thinking of Ali, though he and the others downplayed the singularity or uniqueness of this opportunity to lend intention to action. This attempt at *nīyat*, then, is immersed in the context of everyday actions: donating blood may be outside of one's daily routine, but the opportunity to establish benefit is one among various other everyday actions, they suggested.

Specifically, a vocalized *nīyat* is often required in the contexts of more formal public gatherings, rituals, performances, and modes of address. Qur'an recitation requires it, for instance. This was underscored for me a week after the Ramadan blood drive, when I joined a meeting of a Qur'an reading class organized at the *imāmbārgāh*. The leader of the Qur'an class matched me, and my ability to read

Qur'anic Arabic, with a group of mostly eight and nine year old boys. As I listened to the others slowly and carefully pronounce the words in mostly-correct diction and varying degrees of fluency, I tried to discern and recall patterns for conjoining words and dropping consonants in spoken *fuṣḥa* Arabic. The challenge so preoccupied me as I listened, that when my turn came to recite I forgot to begin with my own *nīyat*, an intonation of the *bismillāh*, and the group leader politely stopped me. The full phrase—*bismillāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*, meaning "In the name of God, most gracious, most merciful"—when recited at the beginning of a recitation, implies an intention to devote the act of reading Qur'an to God. The *bismillāh* is written at the beginning of almost every *sūrah* (chapter) of the Qur'an, though the recitation group extended the requirement to include this expression of one's *nīyat* at the beginning of each new speaker's turn.

Months after that, in September, I had the good fortune to be invited to sit with Asgar and an Indian poet, Adil, as he undertook a process of "giving" Asgar a poem to recite, line-by-line. Asgar had caught the attention of Adil months earlier, when he had recited another poem at a *majlis*. Living poets often enter into exclusive relationships with reciters for the permission to publically recite particular poems. Asgar introduced me to Adil after *majlis* one evening, and I helped facilitated their meeting later that night. We sat in my car, with the poet in the front passenger seat and Asgar sitting in back. As he read the poem aloud to Asgar, line-by-line, he would occasionally show Asgar his own page, to clarify the spelling of an esoteric word, for instance. In the end, he also gave Asgar a sense of the "tune" by singing the verse out loud. The process was interactive: after mirroring the poet's

tune on a line, Asgar once asked "here it is possible to go high?" ("*idhar high ćel saktē haiṅ?*"). After considering for a few moments, Adil agreed it was Asgar's choice ("*āpkī merẓī*").

As they proceeded like this, I noticed an inscription at the top of Adil's page that he had not read out to Asgar aloud, and asked about it. He showed it to me and explained it was a two-fold *nīyat* that he appended as a preface to all his poems. The first line read *bismillāhi r-raḥmāni r-raḥīm*, and the second line read *ya 'Alī molā haq* ("Oh Ali, master of truth"). I asked Asgar if he would recite it as well. He mentioned that he would begin with a *nīyat* to Ali, mostly like simply "Ya Ali," he suggested.

The Shia I worked with in Dubai underscored the basic necessity to orient one's heart to Allah, or to one of the infallibles, in order to invest actions with added benefit. While they attested to the equal value of either vocalizing or thinking one's intention, vocalized *nīyat* itself has the character of ritual, and often attaches to ritual performative actions. Giving *nīyat* by thinking of Imam Ali at a blood donation in the week prior to his martyrdom is sufficient, Asgar and his friends told me, to lend the action an added benefit. But to vocalize one's intention in blood donation—they suggested some donors do—more clearly places the act into the category of ritualized actions, including the performance of Shia mourning poetry, for instance. To vocalize *nīyat* in blood donation, in other words, more clearly aligns the act with the ritual of self-injury that many Shia in this community aspire to enact. In a context in Dubai where self-injurious *mātam* is not allowed by the state, due to its graphic nature and controversial status as an "excessive" and political Shia ritual,

blood donation under *nīyat* is perhaps the only type of "blood letting" religious ritual that is also encouraged by the state.

Fā'ida-*paradigm*

I end this chapter by returning to the world of Dubai as constituted by the movement and momentum of non-work life. Here, I consider aspects and qualities of roads networks and of vehicles that enable some of the key *fā'ida* activities I have already described, such as the distribution of leftover food to distant labor camps. But as a converse affect, I explore the temptation to pleasure associated with driving that pose a problem for those most committed to the pursuit of *fā'ida*. As a starting point I return to the world of downtime driving, and the instance in which Nadim reacted with frustration a nighttime drive morphed into idle conversation and aimless roaming about the neighborhoods of central Dubai.

A variety of studies see cars as tools enabling the subversion of normative class and power structures. Enda Duffy has described how, through driving cars, individuals reappropriate qualities of mechanical speed and efficiency, germane to the "Taylorist" ethics of work environments, as a form of personal pleasure (Duffy 2009, 4-5). Elizabeth Povinelli has described the car as a force enabling not merely mobility but also the transformation of bodies made "numb" and "exhausted" by work, and "alienated" by poverty and racism. In the parable from the film *The Killer Sheep* that she draws on, however, the exhaustion from human work *on* the car, in a condition of economic depletion, overcomes the protagonist, and his attempt at making it functional fails (Povinelli 2011, 101-103). Pascal Menoret highlights the

practice of joyriding in Riyadh as a form of anti-establishment protest by a youth underclass, enabled by the infrastructure of roads. It is a practice that "unbuilds" the city, inverting the security structure that pervades the city at times outside of predawn hours, when joyriding is practiced (Menoret 2014, 12, 133-134). As cars co-opt an increasing range and proportion of life experiences, the spatial logic of the city—i.e. of tightly integrated zones of home, work, business, and leisure—is further "unbundled" (Urry 2005, 28).

Kathleen Stewart renders the collapse together of still images particular to the landscape, in an account she gives of driving in the coal country hills of West Virginia. She also goes a step further than Menoret, rendering the desire she observes in herself and other careful drivers to abandon oneself to the "thing in motion," and to the surrounding texture of "dizzying" density of things collapsing together. In this way, she references Levinas to define the mountain road as a space of *alterity*: "a state of being in between where things are neither fully present nor absent" (Stewart 1996, 67-69). While she does not mention it, I believe her reference to this particular experience of driving also resonates with the notion of observer's "coincidence" with a moving object developed by philosopher Henri Bergson (2007, 1-4) in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

The community I worked with in Dubai had a baseline mobility that allowed them, for instance, to attend *majlis* gatherings: that is, to enter into the "community" of Shia practitioners around particular *imāmbārgāhs*. As such they had notably more freedom of movement than those laborers whose companies accommodated them at isolated camps. Still, they were more conservative in their movements, especially

on the road, than more "free-wheeling" young Emiratis. Many quietly critiqued the practices of native Emiratis to me, associating them with both work laziness and reckless road-behavior. In some important ways, the foreign workers I interacted with configured themselves oppositely: hard working but restrained in their road movements.

The car has the character of an enclosed private space engaging other mobile machines and people in the very public settings of roads. Roads as "free-use" spaces accommodating all users are belied by the hierarchies, strict conventions and rules of use, and by the secured privacy of cars. Most in the community feared police surveillance and punishments for transgressions, and also avoided confrontation with locals and Arabs generally. On the road, some of my research participants would characterize careless drivers as "Egyptian," while further assuming speeding drivers in black window-tinted SUVs to be locals. Still, they deferred and avoided any confrontation with either group.

This contrasted with one particular (and in some ways minor and semi-serious) "road rage" episode I was involved in, while driving my car at night in the al Rashadia area of Dubai. My passengers were three Pakistani Pathan members of the Shia community, all who worked as taxi drivers in Dubai. While going through a tunnel, I failed to yield way to a car who wanted to pass, who loudly blasted its horn and flashed its lights. Preparing for a confrontation, and a bit nervous and agitated, I watched as the car sped up on a widened stretch of road on the other side of the tunnel, and the car came up beside us. The occupants made raucous taunting gestures, to which my participants playfully responded in kind, while seeming

amused and mostly-feigning outrage. I noted the other car's occupants were also South Asian young men, though not Pathan. My informants identified them as "Malwari," a derogatory term applied generally to South Indians in Dubai, and specifically to the many Keralite workers especially associated with the "Malabar" coastal area.

On the one hand, the car's privacy allows for expressions of anger directed at others that would not be possible in other public encounters. But the inhibition, playfulness, and distraction that car-driving creates, as exhibited in this episode, poses a problem for those who value and seek productivity and efficiency in non-work experiences. The rapid crush of images, the status of easy mobility, the drone and vibration of an engine (building on the notions about driving that Stewart presents), conspire to lull drivers and passengers into distraction. Furthermore, the smooth concrete road surfaces allows for both fast driving and pleasurable experience: temptations of which Nadim was frequently critical. Still, Nadim was among the most enthusiastic about my decision to retain a rented car in the late summer months of 2012, and he was perhaps my most frequent companion in various afterwork activities. This underscored his alternative view of the car as a useful tool, or in his playful locution, as a "*fā'ida-siyara*."

Nadim's concern for making actions and things beneficial was captured through frequent and creative references to *fā'ida*. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Nadim used locutions such as *fā'ida*-phone. While he owned a simple cell phone, which he used for texting and voice calls, he applied the phrase to my phone—a third-generation iPhone—to describe its multiple benefit. I would

occasionally use my phone to play videos, such as *mātam* videos, for those who asked for it. I would use it to take photos and to record *majlises* and interviews. Nadim and others would ask to use it to make low-cost internet-based calls to India and Pakistan. In another instance and context, Nadim joked with me when one friend asked me about the procedure for securing a visa to visit the United States. When I answered that I was unsure, Nadim turned to me, presuming I was intentionally withholding valuable information, teasing: "you want to take some *fā'ida*, no?"

Nadim's concern for *fā'ida*-actions, and for my car, also related to a desire to not waste time. He regularly advised me to avoid conversing with certain people, wondering what the benefit was to me, and suggesting that I not waste my time. He also advised me against giving a ride to anyone who might request it, predicting that many people would try to become my friend in order to avail the benefit of an occasional ride. Perhaps to lend his appeal legitimacy, he often declined or cut short rides with me in the car, describing an aversion to aimless or wandering travel: which he often denoted using the Hindi verb *ghūmnā* or the English word "rounding."

In another related episode, in early September, Nadim and I sat in the back seat of a car belonging to another mutual friend, Datu, as he drove and Saad sat in the passenger's seat. Distractedly, Datu and Saad discussed the technical details of recording Datu's *nōḥa* recitation in a studio, while Saad also frequently burst into sung recitation. Nadim idly showed me a bruise on his leg and told me about falling at work, in broken English: "my intention is not: *tez*, fall down on platform – this is

g̱halṭī [mistake]." Later he asked whether I had been "rounding"[33] (driving around) the previous night in a nearby neighborhood with other community members. I said I had not.

About four minutes into our "rounding" with Datu in his car, Nadim spoke up to cut short his participation, as we happened to drive near to his labor camp accommodation:

> Nadim: *Datu bhai, mērī kō idharī, agar āp utār dēngē tō achhā rahēgā*. (Datu, if you could let me get out here, that would be nice.)
> Datu: [surprised] *Abhī?* (Now?)
> Nadim: *Hāṅ jī. Kyoṅ kī mērī ṣubaḥ duty hē.* (Yes yes. I have to work in the morning.)
> Datu: *Ohhh … Sure hō?* (Are you sure?)
> Nadim: *Jī jī. 'in shā'Allāh kal shām kō mulāqāt hōgī* (Yes yes, inshallah we'll meet tomorrow …)
> Datu: *Āpkī merẓī. Hum nē sōchā thā ki āp humārē sāth inkā ćhōṛ kē phir ā'ēṅgē?* (As you like. I thought you would come with us to drop him off [drop Saad at his friend's place], then come back?)
> Nadim: *Nahīṅ nahīṅ, bahut dēr hō jā'ēṅgī. Kam sē kam ēk ganṭa lagēṅgē*. (No no, it will get way too late. It will take at least an hour.)
> Datu: *Ah. Ārām sē …* (Oh ok, don't worry …)

This second episode in September mirrors the first I related above from late August, in the opening section of this chapter. The notion of *ghūmnā* in Urdu is sometimes casually translated as "rounding" in English, and also means "to turn," but in this context implies wandering or aimless travel. In addition to the notion of wasted time, I see Nadim's statement of his displeasure at our "aimless driving," in the brief excursion in late August, relates to the wandering and increasingly distracted nature of the conversation at the time.

His aversion to these forms of distraction and aimless driving, in these examples, was also rooted in what I considered his greater religious conservatism,

[33] A word often used by Urdu speakers in English speech, as a substitute for *ghūmnā*.

and in particular, his disinterest in Shia religious poetry. On some car-rides, he openly mocked and teased Saad as he sang poetic lines. After taking time to learn a few verses myself, during my sessions with Asgar and the poet Adil, I presented them to Nadim one evening, and showed him my sheet where I had transcribed them. He listened and read before commenting, "*kalām achhā he*" ("the words are good"), and then asked me to stop singing. He enjoyed reading poetry but not listening, he told me. When I pushed him on his rationale, he admitted being unsure whether reciting with tunes was *mustaḥabb* (virtuous) in Islam. He preferred to read or listen to unsung poetry, and preferred the reciters to recite without singing. He wondered what value lay in sung performances. His aversion to poetry audition and to aimless forms of driving was rooted in a sense of efficient actions and against the wasteful or useless expenditure of energy.

Conclusion

Muslims regularly draw on a framework in Islam by which all actions may be categorized according to their value or permissibility. While many basic actions are widely accepted in particular categories—for instance, the five-daily prayers are *wājib* (mandatory) while the worship of multiple Gods is *ḥarām* (forbidden)—many other actions, such as the toneful recitation of poetry, may require a practitioner's everyday adjudication to best determine appropriate participation. Should sung poetry be avoided, pursued, or merely tolerated? The salience of the framework, and its applicability to all actions, helps explain Nadim's abiding concern to identify and avoid wasteful actions.

Still, I argue that the motivation to maximize benefit and to be efficient—as exemplified in the cases of Nadim, Sajdali, and Hamdan—does not follow from religious ideals alone. Rather, this is rooted in an ethic of work, particular to service in Sajdali and Hamdan's cases, and to physical labor in Nadim's case. In other words, the work backgrounds of these people help explain their leadership roles in service-oriented projects in the community, and their strict aversion to wastefulness. Drawing on particular aspects of their work experience, they extend the logic of their commitment to religious service and to the pursuit of spiritual benefit (*ṣawāb*), into the pursuit of everyday benefit (*fā'ida*) and the efficient management of their non-work experience and time. In this way, the ethic of worklife efficiency helps align the pursuit of *ṣawāb* and *fā'ida* as key aspects of the lives of working Shia in Dubai.

So too qualities of environments help conform the practices of efficiency, reflected through the urgency of worklife, that this chapter has traced. In closing, I wish to reflect on two key environments—road networks and medical clinics—tied to the "beneficial" practices I have outlined in this chapter. With respect to the importance of road infrastructure, recall for instance Hamdan's leftover food distribution service. The proposition of the enterprise—to collect prepared food in short and well-defined timeframes, and deliver it to fall-flung labor camp populations before the food perishes—depends on the reliable infrastructure and smooth concrete materiality of the road network. The distribution of excess food to the needy is one among multiple forms of experience enabled by the orderliness of traffic and smooth quality of roads as unencumbered, reliable, and free-flowing.

So too the environment of the medical clinic is often characterized as orderly and austere. Foucault traces a history of hospitals through an impulse in eighteenth-century European society to "create for the sick differentiated, distinct space" (Foucault 2012, 21). In an ethnography of adolescent drug rehabilitation in Baltimore, Maryland, Todd Meyers describes one drug treatment clinic as an "austere" environment designed to foster "seclusion" from the city and disrupt "patterns of drug use and violence" germane to life outside. The "order" of the treatment center helped one patient "maintain his own felt order" in treatment, Meyers writes (2013, 37, 40).

Reflecting these spatial logics, I argue that the space of the blood donation clinic in Dubai allows the donor, the "patient," to project forms of experience by virtue of the clinic's qualities of austerity, orderliness, and compartmentalization from the city. The qualities of the clinical space enable Shia practitioners to project aspects of commemorative religious rituals into the activity of blood donation. The ability of participants to project those religious experiences, in other words, overcomes the physical distance between imāmbārgāh and blood donation site. Like the smooth and unencumbered surfaces of roads, these qualities of space function to multiply the range of possible experiences for the participant.

Smooth, orderly roads allow for free-flowing movement, and are thus consistent with the imperatives of food waste distribution. Austere clinical environments allow for the projection of experiences, and thus foster activities that yield multiple overlapping benefits. These environments are thus productive of "efficiency" in the ways I have defined such forms of efficient activity in this chapter.

I find that the urgency of worklife, and the smooth and austere materiality of these environments, conform an ethic of efficiency for members of this migrant community in Dubai.

2. Excess
Viscerality, war, visual Shia culture, *mātam*

One day in April, on a route to the mosque I had frequently traveled, I transferred at a metro-rail stop onto a surface-road bus and was greeted by a man I'd never met before. The man, who I'll call Firoz, had seen me in the mosque and *imāmbārgāh* several times before, he said. As we got off at a bus stop near the mosque, he invited me to his house. A native of South India, though working in Dubai for almost twenty years, Firoz lived with his family in a modern town house-type residence near the mosque, in a middle-class neighborhood. His father, he explained, had begun a small business in Dubai decades earlier, which he had taken over and developed into a small chain, with five other Dubai locations.

Firoz described his enthusiasm for his business, in spite of the challenge of high rent costs and low sales margins. He felt a familial commitment to Dubai—his aging father still operated the original location, and his two children were born here. A proud parent, he seemed most eager to introduce them to me and demonstrate their accomplishments. His daughter, the oldest—I estimated her to be perhaps 5 years old—had made some paintings, he said, aided by her mother. He brought out two they had recently completed.

The first painting that he unfolded depicted a scene from the familiar fairytale Cinderella. A Cinderella figure sat in the foreground, against a mostly blue background, while a Prince knelt before her, holding a slipper in his hand. The outline of the scene had been pre-drawn on the page, as in a coloring book. Firoz showed it to me approvingly, then flipped it over to reveal the second one, which by contrast depicted a climatic scene from the battlefield at Karbala. In it, Hussain

appears to lie on his back on the ground. Streaks of red and orange around his body appear to depict flowing blood. Several arrows stick up into the air from his body. Other bodies are lying on other parts of the battlefield in similar states. The background is also predominantly orange and red.

Firoz displayed them for me in sequence, then laid them side-by-side on the coffee table as we continued to talk. He only addressed them as distinct images by commenting that he wished his daughter would draw more like the Karbala image. The two were otherwise associated, as if part of a collection: of a child's drawings, of depictions of iconic legendary scenes. Our attention shifted as the two daughters and the mother, who wore *ḥijāb*, appeared and greeted me. The girls showed me their bikes and played on the marble floors, before their mother asked them for help. We continued in this routine until it was prayer time, at which time Firoz and I stood and left in the direction of the mosque, leaving behind the two paintings on the coffee table, together with a few other pieces of mail and empty teacups from which we had drunk.

On the one hand, I begin with this story as a way to further convey some of the texture of everyday life as I observed it for Shia expatriates working in Dubai. In another way, the details of this episode survive in my memory and text given the "starkness" of the Karbala image in particular, as I experienced it then, and later via notes and recollections. On one level, as I develop further in a section below, my surprise at encountering the image in this context reflects a conceptualization of "children" and "war" as mutually "repelling" categories (Trawick 2007, 6). The puzzle for me then, at another level, relates to how particular conditions make

particular images either ordinary or extraordinary, as an aspect of context and everyday experience.

This chapter considers how visceral images particular to Shi'ism become embedded, routine, and "ordinary" in everyday life in Dubai as experienced by members of this expatriate working community. In the sections that follow, I explore how engaging with a variety of imagery (still images and video) allows members to readily access visceral experience, and offsets the lack of opportunities to experience "real *'azādārī*"[34] in Dubai. The life of contrarian images in Dubai mirrors the historical "impermanence" of materials in the Emirate's "austere" natural and commercial re-export environment. I note, for instance, that the child's drawings Firoz showed me were not displayed in his house, but were rather uncovered and displayed for me: an occasion of showing them to a guest. Meanwhile, images online and on phones animate the physical environments in which they are viewed, but only fleetingly. In the examples that follow, I take seriously the surrounding environment in which mobile video or image viewing occurs: as if certain moments could be freeze-framed in their three-dimensional existence, and considered from different lines of sight.

Still, fleeting images like these are not "of" these viewing environments, and are thus of elsewhere: for instance, of the environments in which they are captured, framed, edited, produced, uploaded, or stored. Like re-export goods and the wind-blown detritus of sand lots, images in Dubai are of elsewhere and do not inhere in,

[34] *'Azādārī*, a Persian-origin word, collectively refers to the public mourning rituals that Shias engage in around Muharram (see for instance Qureshi 1981, 63; Zahab 2008, 105). "Real *'azādārī*," in the locution that members of the group from Rawalpindi used, implied the use of forceful *mātam* in these rituals.

but rather "pass" through, over, and around materials in the built environment. Trangressive images, like illicit capital, are immersed and concealed in the powerful transregional flows, natural and economic, that constitute Dubai's dynamic environment. Jumpy video images flash across bobbing cell phone screens, soaked against the abundant sunlight of the Dubai side-street, as a group of men spontaneously gather around outside the imāmbārgāh to view a *mātam* video recorded in India or Pakistan. The images themselves shake within the YouTube video frame as the recorder's own cell phone jostles in and out of sync with the mātam performance itself. As he records, he captures other onlookers' cell phones extended toward the unfolding event. These video images are woven into an environment in Dubai of a ubiquity of video-ready smart phones, and remain inconspicuous.

Technologies are instrumental in this process of an environmental enfolding of images. Economic policies have created easy markets for both mobile device technologies and internet services: infrastructures that enable access to images. Both the media and mediated content are transient: made elsewhere and quickly consumed. Some of my research participants in Dubai "re-exported" their devices with them when they returned home, while others "recycled" them in Dubai. For instance, a section of Hamdan's email news digests (analyzed in the previous chapter) functioned as a marketplace for the sale and purchase of used goods, including mobile phones. One listing advertised a used mobile phone available "free of cost," requiring interested recipients to justify why the phone "should be given to

you." In such cases where technology is left behind, they become a part of Dubai's "re-use" environment, rooted in austerity, material efficiency, and work efficiency.

Of course, phones and computers are central to many forms of working life. That their worth is measured in terms of their utility rather than as monetary value suggests the essential work-related functions they perform, including facilitating the search for employment. In the final section below, I explore how the mediation of visceral and religious images through work devices, and their consumption in work environments, changes how individuals experience "religious" viscerality in general. I look at how certain excesses of worklife routines help transform and ground religious experiences, and enfold these activities into everyday life. "Screen"-media conform an ethic of "crisis management" or "managed excess" in worklife and religious experience, I argue. Excessive experiences become transfused across the hyper-technologized environments of working office spaces and public streets. The dual crises of joblessness and of Hussain's fate at Karbala are "mediated" together through these practices of engaging imagery in Dubai.

Key characters in this chapter include a group of Pakistani Shias—Punjabis from Rawalpindi—who I got to know in Dubai, and who distinguished themselves from various characters featured in the previous chapter, for instance, for their pursuit of forceful self-injurious *mātam* activities via martyrdom commemorations at *imāmbārgāhs*, and online. This chapter thus expands on a central tension in contemporary Shi'ism, as practiced in Dubai, that I began to explore in the previous chapter. That is, though a variety of activities are structured by an ethics of conservation and efficiency (explored in detail in the previous chapter), a range of

others produce excess, especially those that seek in some way to represent, mimic, reveal, and enact—as a form of protest—acts of extraordinary and unjust violence endured in battle by members of the Prophet Muhammad's direct progeny, over 1300 years ago.

Georges Bataille has described war as a "catastrophic" and "profitless" destruction of excess (Bataille 1988, 23-26). While the tension between efficient and "wasteful" activity produces fractures within the South Asian Shia community in Dubai, based in part on "taste" preferences, I find that extraordinary forms of religious ritual are made "ordinary" as they are integrated into the texture of everyday life through the pervasion of mobile technologies. I argue that video and image viewing via mobile phones is a "haptic" experience (Deleuze 2003, 122-143) for Shia in Dubai, and key substitute for the commemorative enactment of pain via actual *mātam* performances. They integrate visceral felt experience into the mundane and routine forms of everyday life.

Visceral imagery and the texture of everyday life

Let me begin with an extended ethnographic account that considers some of these questions of the environmental enfolding of visceral images. The year 2012—my primary fieldwork year in Dubai—featured a mid-summer, July-August Ramadan. Summers generally herald a shift, in this Arabian desert climate, toward late-night social and work activities. Beginning in June, sports leagues for adults and children are sponsored by the Shia Khoja *jamā'at* leadership board, with sessions often beginning around 11pm or midnight, due to excessive daytime heat. Many

businesses, shuttered during daylight hours in deference to fasters, open and close late. Many companies curtail daily workday schedules, partly acknowledging that fasters—who abstain from food and water from pre-dawn until early evening—experience reduced productivity, especially late in the day. Unemployed or flexibly-employed members of the community might sleep during the day from pre-dawn until mid-afternoon. Though these members fulfill the fasting requirement, they forego the sense of sacrifice Muslims aim to experience in this month. In this category, I talked to a variety of young Khojas who attended college abroad but were home for the summer, and slept during the day.

Given these trends, my own schedule shifted in this season, to adjust to the mostly nocturnal field of activity I was now engaging. Still, research demands sometimes pulled me blinking into the whitewashed outdoor landscape of midday mid-summer Dubai. One morning in June, I awoke early to help a friend who had requested my assistance. I packed an old MacBook into my bag—my secondary laptop which I sometimes used to facilitate field experiences with my participants—and made the metro-train journey into central Dubai. Arriving, I walked the sun-soaked and mostly desolate streets of the residential neighborhood where he rented his room. Though not Ramadan, this was a Saturday: typically the second day of the weekend especially for those working in "white collar" jobs. The following day, a Sunday, also coincided with a national holiday, *Leylat al-Mi'rāj*, literally "the Night of the Ladder," which marks Muhammad's ascension into heaven. Thus for many workers in Dubai, this was the middle of a long weekend.

Asif was at the time unemployed, but had a few days earlier secured a new temporary job contract as a small truck driver for a retail manufacturer. He was awaiting his new sponsorship paperwork, he explained to me. On that morning, he was awake and anticipating my arrival in the room he rented: part of a structure designed as a servants quarters, behind a large single-family bungalow on a leafy palm-lined residential block. To my surprise his roommate and their other friend were not there: at work, Asif explained. All three had called me to come by that morning in order to help them set up a video feed to a particular *'azādārī* program being held in Pakistan that day, broadcast online. The day marked the *shahādat* (martyrdom-death anniversary) of the seventh Imam, Musa Khadim. The program promised to provide examples of "real" *'azādārī*, they told me. They were anxious to show me something that was otherwise unavailable in Dubai, but were also themselves nostalgic for the experience of *'azādārī* in programs like that.

Asif was in his late twenties, unmarried, and had come to Dubai two years prior on a work visa with a construction services company. He and his roommates were all Shias with non-*Sayyid* backgrounds, and had family ties to a village approximately one hour's drive south of Rawalpindi in Punjab, Pakistan. My relationship with this group had grown out of some tension with the group that I chronicled in the previous chapter—Saad, Asgar, Nadim, and Sharif—in part over this group's preference for more-forceful *mātam* rituals. The Rawalpindi group also included an active *nōḥa* reciter, Bashir, who shared Asif's room. Though they lived near the Khoja *imāmbārgāh* in central Dubai, they regularly attended another Thursday night *majlis* program in a more densely urban and commercial area of old

Dubai, near the Dubai creek. I attended the majlis with them on a few occasions, later offering to drive them there and back with my rented car. The imāmbārgāh was older than the Khoja center, and of poorer construction. It featured a very small indoor hall, and by contrast, a large courtyard area with a high wall. The construction was thus conducive to the rigorous forms of open-air *mātam* performed there, which these men sought.

As the time approached 11am, Asif and I opened my laptop, then struggled a bit to connect to the internet. Once online, we navigated to the website operated by an *imāmbārgāh* in their native village. Unfortunately for us, the live feed on the page appeared to be down. A bit further down the webpage, we found some video recordings of previous *majlises*, including a few featuring *'azādārī* from this year's Muharram gatherings. We watched for a bit, then Asif asked me to find a few more on YouTube. He gave me three search terms: the name of the village, and the name of a prominent *nōḥa ḵẖawān* (*nōḥa* reciter) and "zanjir." The results produced a variety of videos; I recognized one. We watched for a bit as the men vigorously whipped themselves with blades. After a few minutes, we again returned to the website of the village *imāmbārgāh*. The feed was still down. We searched for again on YouTube, and after a few minutes Asif selected another *zanjīr*[35] video, which we watched. After that, we again returned to the *imāmbārgāh's* web page. It was still down.

We gave up, and as it was then approaching time for *ẓuhr namāz* (midday prayer), and agreed to walk back together to the nearby Shia mosque in the

[35] *Zanjīr* is the Urdu word for "sword," and in this context denotes forms of *mātam* in which participants self-flagellate with swords.

neighborhood. We walked out onto the street, which was still quiet and empty of people or traffic. I felt the contrast between the three environments: a) the Spartan and darkened room where we had crouched around the *zanjīr mātam* videos enlarged on my laptop screen, b) the imaginary scene in Rawalpindi—perhaps like others I had observed in person in India and in online videos, with throngs of black-clothed and bare-backed men whipping themselves in the daylight gathering (it was mid-afternoon in Pakistan), and c) the vacant mid-summer, mid-weekend, white-washed streetscape in Dubai. I am not sure what Asif felt in that moment, but our conversation quickly transitioned back to the world we were actually *in*, and to work. He immediately began to again discuss with me the details of his new job, while earnestly confiding lingering anxieties about his long-term prospects in Dubai. *"Kāsh, me …"* ("alas …") he said at one point, his thought seeming to trail off before he could articulate it to me.

Violence in everyday life

In the previous chapter, I began to develop an argument about pain as a central aspect and affect of modern Shia experience. I explored my informants' tacit efforts to lend "intention" to everyday actions, and thus to subtly infuse painful memories of historical martyrdom experiences into everyday life. These efforts draw on an ethics of efficiency rooted in a) the particular work routines in which my informants engaged, and b) various Shia and Islamic traditions that they referenced, I argued. The examples indicate how certain ritual actions significantly reduce and condense the original destructive actions that they commemorate. For example,

mouthing or thinking the words "ya Hussain" imports the physical memory of extraordinary pain and injustice from Karbala toward orienting a mundane modern-day action. For the key participants I followed in that chapter, such condensed commemorative actions *substituted* for other more visceral forms of expression I explore in this chapter, and in one way, indicated a "taste" preference.

In the current chapter, I also explore the means by which painful rituals, and historical memories of pain, are woven in everyday life. Yet in this chapter, I highlight a different aspect of the Dubai environment in relation to the commemorative activities and representations I trace. Rather than the qualities of efficiency and restraint, that is, I find visceral image consumption reflects Dubai's environment of material fluidity and impermanence. Furthermore, in image and video viewing, I find that representations of pain are *concealed* and more-effectively managed, rather than reduced or condensed. Visceral images are thus productive of an ethic of *excess* in Dubai life: one that builds on an environmental material impermanence and aligns aspects of Shia experience with the sometimes seemingly perpetual struggle for employment.

Just as the rampant flow of illicit capital and goods belies Dubai's strict security culture,[36] and natural forces imperil extraordinary artificial "built"-environment projects,[37] visceral images contrast with the environmental calm that surrounds many Shia sites in Dubai: a point I develop further in the next section

[36] On wide-scale smuggling, money laundering, and contraband trade practices in Dubai, see Davidson (2008a).
[37] For some pre-market downturn assessments of this phenomenon, see Mike Davis (2008) and Yasser Elsheshtawy (2008). For the tension between construction projects and destructive natural forces, including the ambitious World Islands archipelago project, see Hawco (2013), and a pictorial representation in Image 2.1.

below. In other words, while the robust circulation of online and mobile images "belongs" to the environment of material impermanence in Dubai, the experience of viewing and consuming them agitates against the quality of environmental efficiency and restraint that I chronicled in the previous chapter, and explore further in Chapter 4 below. Key informants in this chapter thus face a challenge to reconcile extraordinary and epic experiences into the restrained and surveilled environments of everyday modern public life in Dubai. The question is often central in studies on the effects of war, violence, and trauma on the conduct of routine life. For Shias, the challenge is neatly summed in the oft-cited injunction—which I first heard expressed among Shias Muslims I met during research in India, and that was

Image 2.1: The making of a palm island in Dubai. Available online [accessed October 27, 2016]: https://architectureintlprogram.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/the-construction-of-palm-deira.jpg

repeated in various conversations and instances in fieldwork in Dubai—that Shias ought to live "as if everyplace is Karbala, and everyday is *'Āshūrā*."

What strategies are necessary in order to transition between epic and mundane struggles? Or put differently, if everyday is *'Āshūrā* and everyplace is Karbala, how do Shias go about mundane labor in daily life? How do images such as a child's drawing of Karbala and of a Cinderella story come to sit comfortably side-by-side, and relatedly, how do representations of extreme suffering and graphic self-violence become immersed in strictly regulated environments like that of Dubai?

To read the juxtaposition of scenes from Karbala and Cinderella as jarring might reflect a view of the association between children and war as "repellant:" a view, in other words, that the phenomenon of children in war is a devastating excess. The viewpoint partly relies on a "cosmopolitan, universalist, and fundamentally Western mind-set" Margaret Trawick suggests, in her ethnographic study of Tamil liberation soldiers in Sri Lanka, set in the early 2000s (Trawick 2007, 6). For this perspective, Hussain is sometimes criticized for having brought his family into the battle so closely with him. Nonetheless, given the central role of children in the Karbala episode, it is not surprising that Shia parents in Dubai present their children in commemoration rituals as extensions of the identity and experiences of the children at Karbala.

Hussain's infant son Ali Asgar was killed in Karbala, as the mytho-historical narrative goes, by an arrow that pierced his neck. Various accounts suggest that the infant was trying to protect his father at the time. Hussain's daughter Sakina survived Karbala, though was captured by Yazid's forces, along with most other

women and children in Hussain's party. She was mistreated by her captors—the epic account suggests she was slapped and had her earrings snatched from her ears, causing them to bleed—and died in captivity in Damascus approximately one month after Hussain's demise at Karbala. One ethnographic account describes how present-day mourners in Iran dress young boys in clothes that mimic the images of Ali Asgar circulated on posters and other visual representations, and bring them to march in the public processionals (Flaskerud 2010, 138-139). Another describes how parents of young girls dress them like Sakina at women's mourning *majlises* in Pakistan (Abbas 2009, 142).

In my own pre-dissertation fieldwork in India in 2006, I watched from a high balcony, one cool night in February, as a small group of men performed a Muharram mourning ritual in the main courtyard of Lucknow's *Baṛā Imāmbārgāh*, surrounded by a large crowd of *majlis* participants. The men lined up to take their turn walking over hot coals: a trial of endurance and self-inflicted pain, intended to commemorate the painful experience of Hussain's party at Karbala. One-by-one, the men slowly approached the coals, arranged in a rectangular space about six feet across. They then quickly but deliberately walked over the embers. One man approached slowly holding a toddler-aged child. Just as he was about to walk across, he put the child's feet down into the coals along with his, and walked with his child across them. With some evident disapproval, a few men nearby quickly leaned in to try to grab the man's arm, to force him to lift the baby. He aggressively resisted their attempts and continued to complete the ritual, then picking up the child and quickly walking away. As with the self-flagellation ritual, Shias attest to feeling no pain (Schubel

1993, 146) as they complete these actions with sincere focus and "intention," in a state that David Pinault has compared to ecstatic states of selflessness the Sufi practitioners feel, in which self-injury no longer registers as pain (Pinault 2001, 33-37).[38]

The attempt of the man in Lucknow to engage his child in the ritual, and the mixed reaction of visual dismay and dispassionate concession from the mostly-admiring crowd, demonstrates the complex range of beliefs and practices, within a community, on proper social roles for children. Pamela Reynolds has worked to elucidate the mix of universal values ("children are seldom, if ever, treated equally [to adults]"), particular class and cultural values, and even individual values ("we see children through the eyes of the past. Our ways of seeing are defined, in part, in [our own] childhood"), which underlie conceptions of the place of children among adults (Reynolds 2000, 145-146). And in the context of children in war, Veena Das and Reynolds caution that a critique of the notion that "Western models of childhood" apply cross-culturally must also not assume that non-Westerners are unconcerned or not "sorrowful" at seeing their children become "embodiments" of violence (see Hart 2006, 8). These accounts, and the ritual I observed in Lucknow, suggest the indeterminacy with which the relationship between children and war is adjudicated by individuals and sub-factions within specific communities.

The particular coordinates of Firoz's daughter's relationship with Karbala, then, are a) embedded in a process of adjudicating that plays out in the Shia

[38] Schubel offers a contrasting interpretation, describing the absence from *mātam* rituals of aspects associated with other types of ecstatic performances, such as those performed by "Hindu *faqirs*" (Schubel 1993, 146).

community broadly, and b) an aspect of parenting in general that builds on a multifocal system of beliefs. For the community in Dubai, then, and for Firoz in particular, the challenge is not one of reconciling a Western restraint with indigenous excess, but rather one of stitching together things and images from the environment and those from historical memory. Here the question of how the extraordinary becomes immersed in the ordinary overlaps with how absence becomes present.

Working among Partition survivors in Delhi 1973 and 1974, anthropologist Veena Das found that the extraordinary aspects of past are woven inside everyday language. She tracks the painful memories of violence not as a repressed past but as a "surface" quality of language, present in the silences between words and the "gestures" of language. Partly to make her point, she examines a short story in Urdu of Saadat Hasan Manto. The scene is a Partition-era hospital. In the course of what might be considered everyday care, a doctor has a mundane reaction to the environment. Feeling hot, he says, "*khol do*:" a request to open the window. A young female patient in his care—in a state that Das describes as "living death"—responds to the call by untying her pants (Das 2007, 10-11, 46). The reader understands that the ordinary language of the call evokes a memory of past trauma—most likely a rape—for the patient, prompting a partial "reenactment" of the experience. The doctor is apparently shocked by her reaction. That ordinary language can prompt both an ordinary action and an alternative action—one linked to a traumatic past experience—helps relate how a past extraordinary event can be woven into the

present. The surplus energy of war and violent trauma is defused into the everyday present: it becomes constitutive of a way of living.

Religious emotion / religious environment

To better understand how mobile images function to enable Shias to integrate visceral commemorative experience into everyday life in Dubai, let me first try to further draw out the tension between the viscerality in Shia life experience and the Shia public environment in Dubai. Based in part on the importance of ritual weeping and other forms of "painful" expression—such as the passionate toneful recitation of elegies—at Shia public gathering events in many parts of the world, Shia Muslims are often reputed among non-Shia Muslims as being (excessively) emotional about early Islamic figures. James Wilce has noted the historical connection between lamentation and madness, including outsiders' perceptions of Shia mourning practices (Wilce 2009, 53). Many YouTube videos that feature *nōḥa* and *marṣiya* performances include exchanges, sometimes hostile, between professed Shias and non-Shia critics. One *nōḥa* recitation video[39] contains a comment, representative of many critiques in the YouTube comment forums, though in more measured and conciliatory than some: "I love Hussain too but what's the point of WHIPPING yourself? Would he have wanted you to do that? Get on with your life and don't be OBSESSED with the past. LOGIC???" Forces within the Shia community, including a variety of clerics, also express concern about such emotional practices, when they are "taken to extremes" (Pinault 2008, 96). Laura Deeb cites,

[39] Available online [Accessed November 10, 2015]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jx765ERxe2A.

for instance, one Shia leader who criticized as "backward" the motivation of some reciters to elicit as much crying as possible from listeners (Deeb 2011, 142). Among the Iran-based Shia clerical order, the concern against excessive public emotional or self-injurious displays relates in part to the potential harm it could cause Shia Islam, and Islam in general, to outside viewers around the world (Pinault 1999, 299).

A multi-sensory, full-bodied, or visceral response to linguistic triggers—poetic or mundane—was evident to me in even the most initial and tentative of my fieldwork encounters. In pre-dissertation fieldwork in Abu Dhabi, in 2009, I took a ride one evening from an open air Muharram gathering site to a small informal *niyāz* gathering at a participant's house. I sat in the front seat as a young Pathan drove us to the bungalow in his taxi. As we talked about my motivation for coming to Abu Dhabi, I explained my interest in Shi'ism and early Islamic history. To substantiate my interest, I described a few stories I had recently heard about the life of Fatima Zahra (the Prophet's only daughter, wife of Ali ibn Abu Talib, and mother of Hussain). At the mention of the Fatima's name, tears began to fill his eyes, and he remarked that he also greatly admired Fatima. The response represents for me, in part, the key role of the *Ahl al-Bayt* family members underlying emotional expressions in Shia experience.

Embodied and external representations of Shia identity are hidden in the public environment of Dubai. Suppose, for instance, an outside pedestrian or traveler moving up the narrow two-lane road in central Dubai, on either side of which is the Khoja *imāmbārgāh* and a popular Shia mosque—and which also features a Sunni mosque, many small shops, and finally ends at a major market road

and commercial area. They would likely not realize they have traveled through a major nexus of Shia culture and practice in Dubai. I once had a taxi drop me at the mosque in midday. I had given him turn-by-turn directions from the nearest major landmark: a hotel in the market square in several blocks away. As we arrived at the dusty corner, the driver asked curiously why I had come to visit this place.

The Shia mosque and imāmbārgāh are unassuming. A plaque rests on the mosque's boundary wall, at its front courtyard gate, identifying its link to another Gulf country, though not identifying its sectarian affiliation. The characteristic hand symbol, used to represent the five original family members important in Shia commemoration practices, including the Prophet himself, sits aloft on a pole above the *imāmbārgāh*.

Beyond these two signs, the most significant visual markers of Shia practice in the public areas around the mosque and gathering center, appear on video screens. Two Shia barbers—whose shop sits across from the mosque, and which I describe in more detail in a later chapter—did little to adorn the physical space. The shop featured large mirrors, with a few Islamic symbols affixed to them, such as a calendar in one corner, and a photo of the *Kaʿbah* (the small building at the physical center of Mecca) pasted on one wall. The most prominent feature was a large flat screen TV, mounted high on one wall. Though the TV most often played Pakistani serials, comedies, and reality shows, it was also a medium on which poets, who dropped by the shop, would play their latest poetry videos.

The shop, including a narrow curbside area along its front, was on the one hand an informal meeting center for young members active in the Shia gathering

community, and also a key site for the transmission of creative expressive forms. Near the window, the screen was framed for viewers, sitting inside the shop, by the surrounding streetscape, including the mosque on the other side. Vivid TV images grabbed the attention of the barbers, their customers, and other friends who sat in a line of chairs along the shop's side wall. Poetry recitation videos typically featured the poet, gesturing with his hands as he recites the poem, as cut-sequences fade in and out, depicting battle scenes, swords, fires, horses, shadowy figures, and recognizable Shia sites such as Hussain's tomb in Karbala. The suggestively violent images commanded the attentions of viewers in this otherwise "non-religious" barbershop environment of work and socialization.

Unlike monuments and other stationary public architectures, images are of course "flat" two-dimensional representations, a quality which allows for one-directional forward-facing viewing. Their directionality limits the impact of their attention-grabbing vibrance and flash in the environment. Images are also highly transient, as I have noted in my discussion of other religious images in Dubai in general, thus far. The aggregation of men around screens, in the vicinity of the gathering and worship sites, constitute the most prominent visual "symbols" of public Shia culture in Dubai, I argue.

Mobile technologies: the framing and content of visceral images

While highly vibrant, video images on hand-held mobile phones are easier for viewers to control, and I found that "visceral" videos were most often viewed on these devices. The types of videos that I viewed with young male members of the

Shia community could be glossed primarily as "injury" videos, and secondarily classified as "visceral" and "religious" as well. As with the *mātam* videos played on the barbershop TV screens, I consider these images *haptic* in that they draw the viewer into a close physical sensuous contact with the visual content (Marks 2002).

Many of the videos I observed community members to play on mobile phones featured *zanjīr mātam* and *talwār mātam* imagery, most often recordings from live gatherings from South Asian—or sometimes European—localities. Thus I was surprised one day when a friend and I, walking on the sidewalk near the mosque, came upon a small group of young Shia men watching a different type of video, with rapt attention. The video featured a compilation of still images from what appeared to be skateboarding and other road accidents. Later, sitting with Asad and another friend in Asad's room on a laptop, scrolling through the friend's Facebook feed, we encountered a few images of grotesque accidents. In the feed, these images were mixed in with a variety of others: links to *nōḥa* videos with thumbnail images of *nōḥa k̲ẖawān* (described further in Chapter 5), images with abstract shape and colors framing inspirational text, in English, Urdu, and Arabic (as I describe further in this chapter below).

In both cases, my informants seemed to marvel at the images. They induced cringing reactions: I noted a range of contortions on my informants' faces. By aligning *zanjīr mātam* mourning videos with the genre of "random-accident" videos, viewers import the experience of self-injurious *mātam*—and thus the memories, experience, and feelings of Karbala—into the environment of Dubai. Road, bicycle, and skateboarding accidents, as a depiction of visceral pain particular to urban

environments dissociated with the traumas of war, echo in the everyday environment of Dubai. Accident images cling to speeding cars, busy intersections, and crowded shared-use spaces.

In writing about the connection between Shia *mātam* rituals and Sufi ecstatic rituals, David Pinault describes how Sufi dervishes will sometimes engage in a type of group competition to see who can achieve a greater "degree of divine rapture" (Pinault 2001, 37). Viewers engaged with injury videos in a way that similarly sought ever-more extraordinary depictions of pain, I observed. I once encountered a group of men assembled around a mobile phone along the road in front of the *imāmbārgāh* in central Dubai. Later in fieldwork, again encountering this YouTube video on an informant's computer, I learned from the title that the place is attested to be Mumbai. This video begins with a heavy-set middle-aged man waving a long sword in front of himself (see Image 2.2). He slowly rocks the sword and his body in a slow rhythm, as a tightly packed group of men watch, some holding up their own cameras and phones. He then forcefully whips his back with sword twice, incurring deep open wounds. The live video pauses for a moment and still images depict the graphic extent of his wounds, which ooze blood. As the video resumes, men around the *mātamdār* try to grab him and sword to stop him. He is able to achieve one more blow to his back before he is finally stopped, and the men take his sword and walk him off to a waiting ambulance, while applying pressure to his open back wound. Similar to the accident compilation videos, the men gathered in Dubai to watch this unfold on a cell phone react with a mix of amazement, amusement, and some

Image 2.2: A screen grab from YouTube video featuring a shirtless man performing *mātam* with a large *talwar*, just before he begins to self-flagellate. Video identifies Mumbai as the location. Available online [accessed November 10, 2015]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTdJYyX6uCA

discomfort: they cringe and laugh. After watching for a few minutes, the viewing crowd in Dubai disperses.

The apparently random event of the video's viewing on the sidewalk of a side street in central Dubai, is remarkable in one way because the type of ritual depicted is understood by Shia practitioners to be disallowed by Dubai rules. In conversations, Indo-Pakistani Shia practitioners often referenced the broader landscape of global Shia practice. The Khoja *jamā't* board in Dubai, for instance, promotes itself, in its printed and online materials, via its membership in a prominent global Khoja Shia organization. Thursday night *majlises* end with prayer requests for a list of sick or recently deceased members, with a listing of their cities of resident which includes some frequently-mentioned communities in England, the

United States, and East Africa, as well as India, Pakistan, and Dubai itself. In this global configuration of Shia practice, many people repeated the assertion to me that Shia practice is freer (i.e. free from "*pābandī*," or "restraint") anywhere in the world outside of the Arabian Gulf. This is partly due to Gulf leaders' historical fear of the political organization of Shias, with ties to the religious leadership in Iraq and Iran, given the region's proximity to those states. In fact, after the Iranian revolution, Gulf states were among those "targeted" by Shia groups operating under *welāyat-e-faqīh*, the framework of religious-political governance that Khomeini promoted and installed. In Dubai, historic distrust of the Shia community is compounded by the state's cultivation of an environment friendly to Western business enterprises and tourism. As such, public areas are policed and gatherings forced indoors and subdued (which I explore in greater detail in Chapter 5).

While I argue that hand-held mobile videos integrate well into the environment of security and restraint in Dubai, given their portability and concealability, they also preserve a key aspect of the live-viewing experience. In the backgrounds of many extreme *mātam* videos in South Asian localities, including the video captured in Image 2.3, men surround the *mātamdār*, holding their own cell phones aloft, capturing the experience. In "real time," then, the experience of viewing these rituals is already often mediated through a mobile phone screen, as the men direct their gaze to their phones, framing the shot. The widescale use of phones as media for viewing climactic moments of self-injurious action suggests the value placed on recording these events, and retaining them for later viewing and sharing. Since the original event is mediated in the form of a mobile camera-view,

Image 2.3: Screen grab from YouTube video featuring *mātam*. Available online [accessed April 5, 2016]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAk8SO9omRs

the replaying of mobile videos elsewhere does not constitute a "reduction" or condensation of the live experience. Rather, building on an argument by Nigel Thrift (2008, 162-163), natural and biological motion becomes immediately reduced to "material surface" and sheen, via the pervasion of monitors and video recorders into natural environments.

Crucially, video viewing in Dubai is enabled by the cheap availability of mobile phone technologies in the Emirates, and wide availability of mobile internet connectivity. World Bank data placed internet penetration in U.A.E. at 90%[40] in 2014, higher than the United States at 87%, as well as other Arab countries such as Egypt (32%) and Jordan (44%), and higher than India (18%) and Pakistan (14%).

[40] Defined as the percentage of the population with access to the internet.

More specifically, the U.A.E. has the highest smartphone penetration rate in the world at 73.8% in 2013, according to Google's *Our Mobile Planet* study.[41]

The United Arab Emirates' strong performance in these metrics owes in part to Dubai's long commitment to economic diversification. Historian Christopher Davis has even noted how the central tension and rivalry between Dubai and Abu Dhabi aided the overall federation's growth. Dubai's historical commitment to free trade began as a bid to capture market share in shipping commerce from Iran in the early 1900s—a time when tariffs on trade at Iranian ports were high—by developing its own port as an appealing alternative. Though Dubai nurtured its own domestic oil production as a main driver of its economic development from 1970 to 1990, leaders were perpetually aware of its lag behind production levels of Abu Dhabi. Given the historical openness of Dubai's economy, many foreign oil companies operating in Abu Dhabi at the beginning of its oil boom in 1960 outsourced its supply chain to Dubai (Davidson 2007, 34-36). And in the spirit of free trade, in 1999 Dubai's Crown Prince Sheikh Muhammad established free trade zones for media and internet companies, in a attempt to be "at the forefront" of some "niche" developing industries in the Arab world. By 2000, companies in Internet City (a "free-zone" of Dubai) had developed IT infrastructure, including a submarine internet cable, and provided internet services for a variety of Dubai companies (Davidson 2008b, 116-117). While a range of pro-business economic policies create an environment that limits the organization of Shia religious

[41] Fox, Zoe, 2013, "The 15 Countries with the Highest Smartphone Penetration," *Mashable*, Aug 27. Online [accessed November 10, 2015]: http://mashable.com/2013/08/27/global-smartphone-penetration/

practices, especially in public, these practices survive via mobile phone and computer-based streaming videos: itself a legacy of technology saturation in Dubai's free-trade environment.

Work struggles and visceral-expressive religious ritual

As I mentioned, my interactions with the group that comprised Asad (described above) and his three friends included occasions when I lent them my iPhone or occasionally my laptop, during their non-work times, so that they could access visceral *mātam* video content online. On other occasions, I drove them on Thursday evenings to *majlis* gatherings at an *imāmbārgāh* in central Dubai that featured more forceful *mātam* performances. While *zanjīr mātam* was disallowed in Dubai, and which I never saw over fifteen months of research, *mātam* at this site was loudly amplified and organized in an outdoor courtyard (see Image 2.4). As I argue in Chapter 5, I suppose that this level of sound was tolerated by police given the visually-confined location, nestled along a tightly packed commercial/urban side street area, and one that had a higher level of ambient noise.

Asad's roommate Bashir was a poetry reciter, though he was also the most gainfully employed among the group and he met me and the others infrequently. I had more-sustained interactions with the two other members, particularly as I observed them pursue *mātam* experiences and encounter religious imagery, especially in contexts of worklife, or of the struggle to secure work and be productive. To illustrate the convergence of imagery and viscerality with worklife and job seeking, let me relate two stories of my respective interactions with them.

Image 2.4: Screen grab from video of *mātam* performed at *imāmbārgāh* in Dubai, August 2012. Video by author

Wajd Shah had a working class family background in Pakistan, was in his early thirties and was unmarried. Among his friends, I noted him most precariously-positioned with respect to his unemployment. He had come to Dubai three years prior, working for a company in an industrial port area. His contract had not been renewed, and now he sought work. In his three years, he had earned a driver's license, and now sought work as a taxi driver for one of Dubai's four major taxi companies. On an evening in May 2012, we arranged to meet in the courtyard area of a prominent Shia mosque after *maghrib* (evening) prayers, and I had agreed to help him with his job search. As good fortune had it, we encountered another contact of mine in the mosque: a Pathan who was a taxi driver for a major Dubai

fleet. He was in uniform: he had come to the mosque a bit late to complete his prayers.

Wajd and my Pathan friend struck up a conversation about taxi driving, though my friend discouraged it. He said it was grueling work, twelve hour shifts and monthly earnings quotas, which often necessitate seven-day workweeks. Wajd however described how he was desperate, and my friend said that he would inquire with his bosses whether the company is currently hiring. As Wajd and I left and walk toward a commercial area near the mosque, he seemed a bit more discouraged. I offered to buy him a tea and snacks as we pass an area of cafeterias, and we stop at one, as he continued to describe his search. Fortunately, he said, he has scheduled a job interview he had scheduled in Sharjah for the following day. At the end of the meal, I paid for the food; he thanked me, and asked for 100 durham ($27 USD) loan so that he could pay for a cab to his interview. I gave him 40 durhams, and suggested that he take it as a gift rather than a loan. I also noted to him that it will be enough for a shared taxi or bus to Sharjah. He agreed and took the gift.

Later that week, on Thursday, I met Asad and the others after *majlis*. I asked about Wajd, they said he is at the other *imāmbārgāh*, known for forceful *mātam* in central Dubai. Weeks later I again saw Asad and his friends without Wajd, and they said that he was still searching for a job, and becoming increasingly desperate now, as the grace period on his visa was about to expire. He thus did not meet with them as frequently. He was involved in an interview process with a major Dubai taxi company, they told me. Also, he has been regularly attending the other *majlis* in central Dubai, with a different set of friends.

A little over a month later, I saw him again briefly at a tea stall near a popular mosque. He was much more relaxed then, and explained to me that he had found a job as a driver for a local Emirati family. He was returning to his duty, he explained, and rushed off. I asked one of his friends about his other taxi job, and he said he had failed the English test, and was about to return to Pakistan. But at the last moment, another member of the Shia community recommended him for the private driver job—one for which he was well suited for given his driver's license. I never saw him again thereafter. I note how his increasingly desperate search for a job forced him to disconnect from his usual friend network in Dubai. He also increased his participation in *mātam* activities, according to people his friends were still in touch with, while he sharply curtailed his other leisure or downtime activities.

I suppose that *mātam* participation is an outlet for Wajd to express some of his work-related frustrations, given the heightened emotionality common to both the condition of joblessness and these genres of commemorative performance. A wide body of ethnographic work explores the mutually-enhancing relationship between forms of expression and forms of labor. In her study of Wolof *griot* poets, Judith Irvine shows how highly emotional sung poetic performances "arouse" laborers to work "more energetically and enthusiastically" (Irvine 1989, 260). Erik Mueggler's study on poetic mourning genres in Yunnan, China shows how "mourners explicitly associate the work of grieving with the labor of making hempen cloth" (Mueggler 1998, 981). A variety of studies explore how work song traditions emotionally express the "aspirations" of migrant laborers (Coplan 1987, 418; Erlmann 1996, 109) and how popular religious poetic genres express affects of

aspiration and regret in rural labor experiences (Miller 2007, 274; Pandian 2010, 70). As a genre characterized by the performance of visceral excess, I argue that *mātam* is particularly well-suited to express the affects of worklife desperation in Dubai, as this story of Wajd's employment struggle suggests.

Real estate excesses, workplace downtime, and religious imagery

In the friend group through which I pursued relationships with Asad and Wajd, I had more sustained interactions with another member. Zakir was unmarried and in his late twenties, and worked at a small real estate and property management office located in a new development on the edge of Dubai's southwestern sprawl, on the road that leads to Abu Dhabi. My relationship with Zakir deepened as he allowed me to join him and observe him in his office during the workday. Given my interest in worklife, I was eager for the chance.

He would generally invite me to meet him near the end of the day, after most of his colleagues and superiors in the small firm had gone home. The office was nestled on a low floor of a modern glass-and-marble office and residential building. His work area—which he shared with two other junior agents at the firm—looked out onto a large outdoor swimming pool, that was always either vacant or sparsely used by residents of the building. Beyond were many other buildings in the large growing development area, which were themselves nestled around two manmade "lakes."

In my time spent with him in his late-day work, he would occasionally take work related calls on his cell phone: arranging details for a showing with a

prospective tenant, or taking information from a current tenant about a maintenance issue. After he got one such call, he explained to me his problem of the market slumping. Tenants were increasingly expecting lower prices, and finding better deals in other areas of the city, but meanwhile owners were loathe to drop prices. The residential development area was only 50% occupied, Zakir explained.

In one of our last evening meetings at work, I accompanied Zakir and helped him facilitate a few apartment showings for some young prospective Arab buyers: a group of young friends who aimed to share a space together. The two apartments were on opposite ends of the new development area around the lakes, and I drove Zakir while the prospective buyers followed us, from one site to another. After the first two showings, Zakir seemed increasingly gloomy. The buyers were critical of the spaces and demanding of information, and I noticed that Zakir could not answer all their questions. When asked about room dimensions, Zakir could not provide specific measurements. At the final stop, Zakir could not get the key from the doorman to show the apartment. To Zakir's surprise, the doorman explained that it was still occupied.

The potential buyers thanked Zakir but left seeming underwhelmed by what they had seen. Zakir turned to me as we walked back toward my car, and admitted that he would probably never see them again. He eluded to his own financial struggles and said he was desperate to close a sale or rental deal. While he was paid a small salary, the bulk of his earnings came from commissions paid on successful closures, he explained to me.

When not showing properties, I often joined Zakir in the late-workday in his office, observing as he used his work computer to browse his personal email and Facebook accounts. On one visit, he asked for my help to improve the look of his Facebook "wall:" the mix of images and text that appeared as a series of posts, connected to his public profile. This included both items he posted and those which his "friends" had posted on his behalf. I had engaged with another group in a similar way in the months prior: those who wanted their wall to reflect a "better mix" of images. After my first meeting with Zakir in his office, I recorded the following in my notes:

> He wanted to make sure that his wall looked good. For him that meant a series of rather serious posts with text about Islam. I helped him unsubscribe from, and then hide a few posts from, a friend of his, who he did not know and did not want to be friends with anymore. He was concerned about his profile being sullied with images of women scantily clad, for instance.

On the occasion of the failed showing to the group of young Arabs, we spent some more time with his Facebook feed. I asked him about a few specific posts, to try to understand what content he liked and what he preferred to avoid. As we discussed a few selected posts, I tried to take detailed notes, and found a few images later online, that had been posted in his feed.

I noted that roughly half of the posts Zakir and I examined closely were of a "genre" of posts that I had briefly encountered earlier, in a session with Asad and his friend (described above). Images in this genre had the sentimental quality of Hallmark cards, and featured abstract images, often of people or things like flowers, framed with textual messages that were often inspirational, religious, or romantic. Such images are often designated as "Facebook wallpapers" online, I discovered

later. Below is a listing of a few of these wallpaper images we examined together, in the order as the appeared in his feed, as a descending scrolling stream of images of text:

Table 2.1

Type of "friend" posting	Description of post:
female	An image of a couple embracing while reading a book, with the words in English pasted over the top: "Together Forever" (see Image 2.5)
female	An image featuring white Arabic text against a black background, reading "There is no power but from God."
female	An image of Imam Hussain's tomb in Karbala, with the area surrounding the tomb blurred, suggesting movement.
male	Abstract shadowy images of minarets and a child's face, with text in Urdu, including in transliteration: *Labbaik yaa Hussain* ("I am at your service Hussain").
female	A composite image: on one side a young woman smelling a flower, on the other side shadowy human figures standing in the bleak landscape, with a fiery red sky in the background. The text is an Urdu couplet (in Urdu script): *Tujhsē mansūb hūyē tō ye ḥaẓrat hī rahī / hum bhī kabhī apnē hawālē sē pakaṛē jātē* [If you make a connection and then immediately feel regret / You will never summon it].
organization	Banner with Urdu language call familiar at *majlis* gatherings—*Naʿre Ḥaiderī*—written in Urdu script, meaning "the roar of the Haideris."
female	An image of a rose along a shoreline, as a wave gently washes around it, and partly erodes a heart shape traced out in the sand. Captioned with the words "i miss you" in English (see Image 2.6).

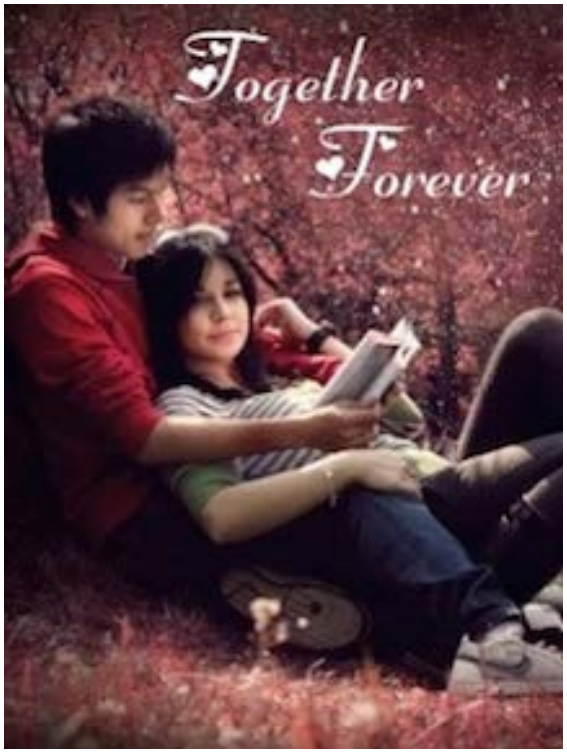

Image 2.5: Copy of image seen in informant's newsfeed, observed in Dubai in September 2012. Image available online [accessed November 10, 2015]: http://www.mobilesmspk.net/wallpaper/love/together-forever_950

Image 2.6: Copy of image in informant's Facebook newsfeed, observed in Dubai in September 2012. Image available online [accessed November 10, 2015]: http://latestfashionstylez.blogspot.com/2012/07/wallpapers-beautiful-wallaper-hd_8665.html

We continued to consider the posts as he took a call on his cell phone, and later chatted with a male friend in Facebook's chat feature. While Dubai's security environment forecloses the opportunity to engage *mātam*, and its conservative social environment discourages contact between the sexes, Zakir's affinity for mātam made the variety of serious religious images on his Facebook feed familiar to him: an affinity that brings them into the ambit of his ordinary life.

Still I argue more specifically that the urgency of his work demands align with the struggle of Karbala (signified by the image of Hussain's tomb, and the "nare haidari" image) and guide him to view and cultivate these images in his experience of his Facebook feed. The scale of the constructed environment in this section of "new" Dubai is large, and the opportunity is equally grandscale. On a daily basis, Zakir enters this environment of soaring towers—most of which exceed 50 stories and have less than 50% occupancy—as a salesman. As I continue to develop in the next chapter, the scale lends the work a distinctly aspirational spirit. As he sits at his work desk, extending his workday as his coworkers have all left work and returned home, he carefully scrolls through Facebook postings and sings *nōḥē* to himself, the words echoing in the halls of the small marble and glass office suite.

Excess time allows him to more fully engage the visceral and commemorative religious content that he otherwise misses in Dubai, as he uses his work computer after-hours. As we continue to talk idly about the events of the day, he also sings a *nōḥa* to himself, chats with his male friends online, and takes a phone call from his friend on his cell phone. In this way, the anxiety over the failed sale, and urgency of completing a deal, are enfolded into the activity of engaging religious content online.

Censoring Excess

I began this chapter with a discussion of two children's drawings, as they were presented to me by a friend. Centrally, I sought to better understand the conditions by which images, spatial arrayed together, come to appear contrasting or repellant, or alternatively, coherent. The popular injunction on Shias to live life "as if everyday is 'Āshūrā, and everyplace is Karbala," and the role of Hussain's own children in the Karbala battle, guide Firoz to accept and celebrate his daughter's renderings of Cinderella and Karbala as equally uncontroversial, I argue. The logic of parental and state censorship of violence, in order to protect the innocence of childhood, does not appear to apply to these particular images.

Much recent writing on Facebook use has emphasized the importance of the requirement that users supply authentic names, in contrast to various online fora in which users shield their identity. As a consequence of Facebook's authenticity policy, studies have focused on Facebook's role to foster "social" connections, a sense of community and belonging (Hillewaert 2015), and even sympathy (Miller 2013; Stout 2016). These studies have been less interested in forms of "non-social" participation in Facebook. I argue that the algorithm that produces a endless stream of variable images allows Zakir to regularly engage new religious imagery, but poses new problems with respect to the undesirable arrangement and intermixing together of religious and non-religious imagery. I contend straightforwardly that Facebook's algorithm is designed to array images together coherently, as an aspect of the user's activity on Facebook, his expressed preferences, the activities of his

friends on Facebook, and so on. Zakir's at-times assiduous effort to adjudicate images in his Facebook feed, and screen out undesirable ones, at one level suggests a failure in the design (e.g. a failure to be sufficiently flexible) of Facebook's "post"-curation algorithm, I argue. That is, while it appears little is "censored" out in the children's drawings Firoz showed me, censorship is effectively insufficient in the case of the Facebook images that Zakir engages.

Specifically, I argue that Zakir's effort to filter out certain unwanted images in relation to desirable ones is rooted in the sense and logic of *ḥalāl*, both as a general Islamic principle, and as I came to observe it operate in Dubai. Zakir's task is particularly urgent given his personal implication into the array of images, as they descend in an endless chain from his user profile, by which he is authentically identified in Facebook's universe. In its basic sense, the logic of *ḥalāl* is one of purity: a guide to conventions by which one ought to interact with, touch, or consume things in the world. I explore the *ḥalāl* framework further in Chapter 5 below, in relation to the hybrid soundscapes of Dubai. In one example, while driving in Dubai with a group of friends and informants one night, the driver reacts to the intrusion of a prayer recitation broadcast over a loudspeaker as we drove by a mosque. The clash of the religious language over our banal and idle conversation posed a problem for him, as he remarks: "how are we to know what to do? Should we stop and listen?" On other occasions, informants discouraged me from playing Qur'an recitations over the car radio, lest the recited words mingle with and become ambient noise in the environment: integrated with idle conversations and idle thoughts.

Similarly, the range of images presented in the Facebook feed is too great: romantic images and religious images do not sit comfortably together, as Zakir's reaction implies. If the endless whirl of diverse images in the Facebook feed aims to grab the attention of users attuned to (or numbed by) a hypermediated landscape of burgeoning new media—a condition sometimes associated with modern life (Bolter and Grusin 2000)—Zakir rejects this form of experience. His position highlights a paradox central to the increasingly salience of "mediated" religious experiences noted in religious publics in general (Meyer 2011; Larkin 2008; De Vries and Weber 2001), and Islamic public in particular (Hirschkind 2006; Miller 2007).

Particular to the stakes of the current chapter, the challenge Zakir faces in engaging images is a reminder that the cultivation of excess, via images that commemorate a battle key to the historical-mythical memory of a community, for instance, in this case also crucially relies on one's exercise of restraint and restriction. Similarly paradoxical: Zakir's problem is a "side-effect" of the same technology that allows him to experience visceral imagery in Dubai's environment in the first place. It is a "cost" associated with engaging the technology: an undesirable excess. I further generalize this ethic—i.e. the cultivation of excess as an exercise in exclusion—via notions of "intensity" and "purity" in Chapter 5 below.

Conclusion

I begin and end in this chapter by considering how apparently contrasting images—religious, non-religious, violent, romantic—become construed or arrayed together. Put differently, I consider how starkly and suggestively violent images are

"normalized" through a process of mingling with others, integrating into a patchwork or flow of everyday images. It helps me consider how extraordinary events and affects are enfolded into the everyday, as key ethnographic studies of violence and memory have suggested (Das 2007; Trawick 2007).

In Zakir's story, I consider how the inflated housing market created an excess of residential space. Anticipating an ongoing boom, developers fanned outward to the city's frontier, and projects like the one around the manmade lakes began. But the real estate market crash in 2009 created a glut of unoccupied residential real estate that Zakir struggled to fill. Meanwhile his office itself was built to anticipate a continuing housing market boom. In the after-business hours of early evening, in the empty space of his office suite, Zakir spent idle time engaging his Facebook feed where he encountered various Shia religious imagery, such as the "wallpaper" encouraging loyalty to Hussain, captioned with "*Labbaik yaa Hussain*."

I argue that the experience of engaging commemorative religious imagery on Facebook substitutes for the first-hand experience of forceful mātam. I consider this an example of how extraordinary affects become integrated into ordinary life. The process where religious images are readily intermixed with others forces Zakir, Firoz, and others to critically evaluate the place and content of non-religious imagery. This includes the burden for Zakir, as a Shia and a Muslim, to censor his feed and protect religious material from the corrupting effect of profane material.

Ultimately, I trace how environmental and market forces create empty spaces and idle machinery—the work computer for instance—through which Zakir recuperates some form of participation in a disallowed Shia ritual. His frustration

over not landing the condominium sale is counterbalanced by the opportunity to "unwind"—in the workspace, and after hours—and engage some of this imagery, and to "curate" his feed.

The environment, in other words, conforms an ethic of "crisis management" or "managed excess" particular to the activity of viewing religious imagery both inside and outside workplace environments. This ethic allows community members like Zakir to align the enduring and epic struggles a) of migrant work in Dubai and b) of Hussain in Karbala. For Shias migrant workers in Dubai, the requirement to remember Karbala and to maintain gainful employment are paramount obligations. Through an ethic of "managed excess" particular to viewing religious imagery, Zakir and others integrate their efforts to meet these obligations into the mundane work of everyday life.

3. Aspiration

Credit and debt, materiality, imagination, precarity, *majbūrī*

I begin with an episode that in some ways resembles the one that began the previous chapter, but with cues leading in different directions. I sat one evening in a small single-room living space shared by five workers, who together formed a small construction services company in Dubai. One of them, Hamid, would become a key months-long relationship in my research. As he sat with me on the carpeted floor of their nearly-windowless room, he described in detail some of their recent projects. As he talked, and as I observed in the coming months, they pursued contracts to source and install gypsum-work and woodwork for home interiors and provide woodwork-finishing and interior painting in homes. Hamid hoped I could help them promote their business in Dubai, and he gave me a business card advertising the services he and another member of the group provided. The English print on the card described their business as "paints and decor" services, though the Arabic print more modestly read *la'amāl al aṣbāgh* ("paint-work"). Taking the card, I cautioned Hamid that my network in Dubai was small, and I might not be of much help in promoting them.

To further highlight their work, Hamid retrieved a binder, which he opened on the floor, revealing a series of photos sealed in plastic laminate. I took it to be their workbook. He described the photos as representative of their work: ones he often presented to potential clients. Attempting to conceive ways that they could attract more customers, I asked if he had considered making a website for the business—or even a Facebook page—where he could post the photos. Hamid winced a bit and shook his head: "*nahīṅ kar saktā, agar hē dūsrī kisī kō ādmī chōrī*

kar saktā." ("can't do it, if we did, other guys could steal them")—which I interpreted as a desire to protect the designs as their intellectual property.

We flipped through the book. A variety of images depicted interior scenes from what appeared to be homes, featuring marble and whitewashed walls typical of villas I encountered in the Gulf region. Mixed in were a few other photos that stood out: one of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, and another which I later recognized as the ceiling detail and fresco of the United States Capital rotunda dome in Washington. I glanced up at him as we passed those images, awaiting any reaction or a suggestion that his casual attempt to claim them as his own might strain credulity. He appeared to scarcely react, however, and we continued on through various other photos, mostly of decorative interior home designs.

To be an entrepreneur is to aspire. Yet what struck me about this group—and others that I observed working to enter near the bottom of Dubai's dynamic development economy—was their soaring self-promotion and ambition despite an apparently modest project track-record and cycle of mounting debt. Over three months, I worked to apprentice myself with Hamid's boss Kadir—the leader of the business—and in the process also became close with the junior members of his team. I joined them at their work-sites and in work-time activities, on contract negotiations, and on supply trips. I participated in extensive "downtime" interactions with them and observed them discuss their work, their contracts, and their debts, among themselves and with other partners in the local Shia community. Finally, I also joined as they organized small majlis gatherings in their room, especially on late Thursday afternoons, when Hamid and others recited verses of

marṣiya poetry and sections from the Qur'an. For perhaps two months in early 2012 the small room in which they all lived together—in a villa directly behind a main Shia mosque—served as a nexus for me as I chronicled their work/life activities.

Over time, certain patterns of their worklife process emerged to me. For instance, I observed them compete for massive contracts—ones that they said would yield profits in the range of a "hundred-thousand" Dirhams (1 US Dollar = 3.67 UAE Dirhams) and require recruiting many contract laborers from India—but later watched them return to their room when negotiations stalled or fallen through and soberly discuss the burden of old unresolved debts. Kadir and others fashioned themselves as "master" designers, or "design-masters," yet I noted how they sourced their decorative gypsum-work pieces from wholesale suppliers. As an elder member of the Shia community, Kadir commanded respect from many younger members, and yet I saw him harshly treated and verbally ridiculed in various business negotiations.

My relationship with them unfolded around a spirit of giving. Kadir, Hamid, and the others were generous to me: I often joined them at meals and in return offered help promoting their business and negotiating deals, some of which they accepted and appreciated. Yet our relationship ended amid their expressions of disappointment when, in the face of acute repayment pressure from other members in the Shia community, I declined to extend them a similarly large cash loan. My relationship with them, in other words, followed an arc seemingly similar to many of their other relationships: ones built on high stakes and grand-scale ambition, but which devolved into forms of bitter disappointment. Over a variety of close

interactions, I noted a persistent gap between a) their high expectations and inflated self-promotion, and b) their business's poor performance and the mundane reality of their work activities.

This chapter seeks in part to draw out the space in which they operated: oscillating between imagined prosperity, virtual profits, and grim reality. In doing so, I aim to show how their aspirational approach to self-promotion draws on grandiose and large-scale materials in the built environment: both actual constructions in Dubai and icons of elsewhere that served to inspire them. In my analysis of various efforts to win work contracts, for instance, I focus on the quality of certain materials at their worksites. For instance, in two key cases below, I note how Kadir, as the group's leader and visionary, was drawn to quality woodworks and the challenge to expertly finish them and, in particular, to correct mistakes that are outcomes and side-effects of the "blunt" processes that drive large-scale construction projects.

Kadir aspired, in other words, to perform high-quality wood-work that befits the high-quality of the materials themselves. For him and his group the lure of the opportunity to "finish" vacant and unfinished constructions, and to work with high-quality materials, conformed to an ethic of striving that affects work activities, social interactions, and religious practices. Their ethic of striving perpetuated a mode of being that was constantly disrupted. The ethic destabilized their social relationships in the community and led them to limit their participation in group religious rituals. It led Kadir to project time-frames that exceeded the expectations of the contracting site managers, for instance. Ultimately, I show below how this striving ethic led

Kadir to overlook potential "quick fix" solutions and to miss deadlines, and thus lose contracts.

As the opening scene to this chapter suggests, members of this group offset and intermixed their admiration of architectural designs particular to Dubai with global architectural icons elsewhere. In another early meeting with Hamid in his shared room I sat with him at the desktop computer that the group shared, as he worked on his Facebook feed, and he showed me an image of the Sydney Opera House. In what I took as an earnest and aspirational appeal, he asked me to help him find similar images of famous American architecture. I searched briefly and found a few suggestions: photos of the Empire State building and the Guggenheim Museum. With evident satisfaction, he posted them to his page.

Researchers have noted that Western architectural icons, particularly skyscrapers, inspire urban designs in Dubai (Turan 2013, 98-101; Elsheshtawy 2010, 152-154; see also Chew and Schmitt 2000). Ahmed Kanna, for instance, quotes an official in Ras al Khaimah, a nearby Emirate, who refers to Neuschwanstein Castle, Versailles, and the Eiffel Tower, and declares, "I think you can create more than this … this is a costly structure, with the same cost, you can make something much more grandiose" (Kanna 2011, 89). I believe that Hamid, in assisting his small company in bidding for contracts at major construction sites around the Emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, is conversely oriented. That is, his interest in Western architecture flowed from his orientation to Emirati architecture in his own work across the country.

I aim to show in this chapter that through their work—and in particular, through their attraction to both a) high-quality materials in the worksite environments in Dubai, and b) the grand-scale of global architectural icons—Kadir and members of his group became alienated from their sense of their own craftsmanship. Unrealized aspiration, in other words, devolved to desperation, which also caused social isolation. It drove a cycle of mounting debt, as they sought new monetary "gifts" or informal loans from friends and relatives in Dubai, usually with a promise of a set repayment timeframe, with a stated monetary need related to a work contract. I noted how they also sought new loans from new friends simply in order to repay old and overdue debts to others.

Their aspirational approach to their worklife diminished their social relationships and their reputation in this community. In a variety of conversations, others in community who knew them derided them for their dishonesty—attributed to their disregard for their promises of repayment—and their excessive desire to accumulate wealth. Their situation parallels a key narrative about poverty and social life, and the stereotype of the "grasping, dishonest poor," in James Scott's celebrated study of class conflict in rural Malaysia. Scott chronicles a man named Razak who fleeces others with unfulfilled promises to provide goods in exchange for money. In Scott's analysis, the tendency toward unscrupulous behavior is natural to "immediate material interest" and thus is common to lived conditions of both wealth and poverty. Ultimately, such tendencies are checked via "social sanctions" against deviant behavior. What dishonest schemes risk, in other words, whether perpetrated by the rich or poor, is social isolation and scorn (Scott 2008, 23-24).

Fatefully, despite concerted efforts to accumulate money, Razak remains mired in extreme poverty. Kadir's efforts at wealth accumulation similarly appear to perpetuate a cycle of debt.

"Imagination," stimulated by grand-scale icons and high-quality materials in the built environments, is key to my inquiry in this chapter, and continues to underscore my analysis in the next chapter. The quality and scale of materials in Dubai's worklife inspire powerful imaginings that sustain life for Kadir and his group. But, while James Scott highlights mutual bitterness between Razak and members of his community, Kadir and Hamid often seemed blithely unaware of or unconcerned with their rupturing social relationships and mounting debts. The prominent place of imagination in everyday life for Kadir's group echoes Amira Mittermaier's argument about the prominent role of dreaming in "modern" life in Egypt. She observes how people conceive dream interpretation as a form of Islamic practice, but also notes how, more prosaically, "dreaming" is registered in certain extravagantly built spaces in Egypt, such as amusement parks and seaside tourist destinations (Mittermaier 2010, 8-9). Various analyses of constructions and engineered landscapes in Dubai also emphasize fantasy and dreaminess as an central element of architectural styles (Davis 2008; Barrett 2010; Elsheshtawy 2010).

In Mittermaier's analysis, imaginations fueled by grandiose architecture serves in part to "counterbalance" the "bleak reality of 'real life'" (8). This chapter traces the particular challenges of Kadir's group to traverse and reconcile the gap between aspirational ideals and grim reality. Attempting to redeem their struggling

company, I trace how forms of imagination tied to worklife sometimes morphed into creative attempts at attribution (as with the photos in the workbook) and other forms of deception. A hallmark of precarious life—and also, I suggest, of the drive of urban planners and architects to build skyscrapers[42]—the potential for the realization of great wealth is conjoined to the potential for great calamity: boom and bust.

Imagination, extravagant accounting, entrepreneurial drive.

I noted a tendency toward extravagant quantification in many of my research interactions. One night in September I sat with Nadim and Asgar (featured in Chapter 1) in a park near the neighborhood's main Shia mosque. We had, in the months prior, conversed about wealth accumulation and work in Dubai, and tensions between capitalism and Islam. Asgar and I sat idly on a bench, as we looked out over the small park, watching cars speed by on the busy road on the other side. Nadim paced nearby, trying to recover some lost data on his phone. We discussed business ideas. To poke fun at the seemingly endless drive for profits projected by some working in Dubai, Asgar wryly announced, "I need 1 crore[43] dirhams to be happy." Nadim extended the hyperbole: "I need 1 crore dollars to be happy," he declared.

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[42] Economist Andrew Lawrence's "skyscraper index" theory notes how the inception of record-breaking skyscraper projects often precede or "coincide" with major economic market crashes, noting the link between the construction of the Chrysler Building in New York and the 1929 Stock Market Crash, for instance (Thornton 2005, 52). U.A.E.-based urban theorist Yasser Elshestawy (2010, 155) extends the model to include the link between the construction of the Burj Khalifa and the 2009 market crash in Dubai.

[43] I.e. ten million.

In a related episode later that month I met one evening with a long-term acquaintance, Nafeez, a Pakistani barber from a shop near the Shia mosque and imāmbārgāh. While others in this community had asked me for relatively large loans in the past, his request seemed to exceed them. I did not fully understand his plea, but he seemed to solicit my participation in a friend's business venture, where my investment, and return, would be "millions." Nafeez's request flagged for me his perception of Dubai's extreme scale of wealth in the context of post-boom economic uncertainty.

My interactions with the group of the designers also featured some "grand-scale" estimations of wealth and profit from their business activities. I sat late one night with Kadir in the room he shared together with his four workers: part of a multi-occupancy single-story "villa" typical to the low-rise landscape of "middle" Dubai.[44] We were joined that night by Junaid, Kadir's Pakistani business partner, financial backer and agent-assistant in deal-making. I observed them as they went over budget details on paper, before a negotiation they anticipated the next day. Having finished, Junaid closed his accounting book, and we sat and engaged in more idle conversation.

Musing openly, Kadir began to talk about his plan to move his group out of its current rented room into a more spacious nearby flat. His vision included Junaid and I. He suggested we could all live there together, each with our own bedroom, while

[44] An area dominated by mostly one- and two-story white-washed (and sand-swept) residential villas, geographically between the narrow winding alleys and tight multi-story mixed residential/street-level commercial buildings of the Creek area—the historic location of the earliest Dubai settlement—and the newer constructions beginning at Burj Khalifa in the "downtown" area, and extending south along the sea coastline from there.

the other workers continued to share their own room separately. Continuing to muse, he laughed a bit as he considered other business projects we could plan and launch together. His voice filled with climactic enthusiasm, as he declared that we could all become "very rich." In an effort to tamp down his expectations, I emphasized my ongoing education and my motivation to learn in Dubai, not to start businesses per se. Junaid also demurred, saying he was only motivated by the need to have "enough to get by."[45]

Discourses and popular understandings of wealth accumulation in Dubai reflect the Emirate's history of market deregulation. In the mid 19th century Makhtum family rulers eliminated taxes on trade to shore up Dubai's status as a regional commercial hub, in part to counterbalance Abu Dhabi's growing political and military prominence. As Christopher Davidson has ably narrated, traffic through Dubai's port increased dramatically in the years following deregulation, an advantage Dubai has retained and defended through later phases of development in the twentieth century (Davidson 2007, 34-35).

Scholars studying social life and urban design in Dubai's development (Kanna 2013; Elsheshtawy 2013) have found useful a literature on spectacle in world cities (Short 2004) and on spectacle in Marxist critiques of capitalistic production (Debord 1983; Davis 2008). Debord routes his critique of spectacle through Marx's theory of labor alienation, where society produces spectacles that then serve to represent the society, for instance as objects of "gazing" and

[45] By expressing restraint here, I interpret Junaid to align himself with basic Islamic injunctions (especially Shia) against hording, rooted for instance in the spirit of *khums*, a yearly tax on surplus wealth from work and business earnings that Shias pay.

"contemplation." But by virtue of their materiality, separation, and inaccessibility, spectacles come to represent a "false consciousness," heightening the displacement of the observer from the material landscape of the city (Debord 1983, 2). David Harvey echoes this concern in describing the effect of alienation and dissociation on life (especially in America) in contexts of urban development, asking "have we become mere monads tossed around in an urban sea" (Harvey 2015, 272).

Towers become spectacles of Dubai's material development and culture of wealth accumulation: objects of aspiration for expatriate workers and especially for designers. I argue that the Shia's community's aspirational participation in free market economies of large-scale wealth accumulation—exhibited by Hamid and his group of designers—on the one hand "dispossesses" them of their original tools of ethical valuation (Elyachar 2005, 7-10), as I develop further below. I also see such aspiration as a form of virtual participation—a perpetual striving for unattainable and outlandish ends rooted in unreal and precarious modes of aggrandizement. I suppose there is a kinship between the plan of my barber friend Nafeez and the get-rich-quick pyramid schemes that proliferated in post-apartheid southern Africa "that flow from a promiscuous mix of scarcity and deregulation" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 281). What such strivings share are their virtual valuations, which, due to their perpetual unrealization are precarious and unstable. The space between the loss of traditional ethical valuations and exclusion from capitalist aggrandizement is the productive space of a virtual striving, itself a product of a precarious vitality.

Textures of aspirational life.

My initial interactions with Hamid, Tamir, and the other junior designers in Kadir's crew—as with nearly all my relationships with members of this Shia community—were based on a sense of generosity and sharing. They were also geared toward fun leisure-time experiences in Dubai. All four junior members of the group were unmarried, and in age we were all roughly peers: Hamid was in his early thirties, Tamir in his late thirties, and the other two in their late twenties. They invited me to join them on occasional shopping trips in nearby central Dubai shopping districts, for instance. On one daytime trip, we snapped cell phone-photos framed against the backdrop of Dubai Creek high-rise buildings, and on another late-night market trip, against the background of a sleek glass-and-metal surface-level entryway to a Dubai Metro station. They were keen to enjoy Dubai's public spaces.

In mixed-social interactions at religious gathering sites, I noticed their tendency to make exaggerated statements and conduct themselves more formally. While these interactions contrasted with forms of free-wheeling enjoyment in public commercial spaces in Dubai, I consider both to be aspects of their aspirational modes in everyday life. They occasionally joined me after *maḡ̲ḫ̲rib* (evening) prayers in the courtyard of the main Shia mosque, an environment that encouraged socialization, chance meetings, and networking. My conversations there covered a wide-range of subjects, but I noted the site was targeted by job seekers. On a few

occasions, individual men would start conversations with me, before offering me their resume and humbly requesting my help in their job-search.

Once, Hamid and I struck up a conversation with two men near us, who explained they were recently out of work. One offered me his resume. Looking at it, I noted to Hamid that he had worked as a painter in his previous job. Hamid quickly ran through the range of projects that Kadir's group was working on, and then started to describe his work at a luxury apartment site, on one of Dubai's infamous "palm-shaped" islands. In this instance, and in other interactions I had with Hamid and Tamir in Kadir's absence, I noticed how Hamid projected himself as if he were the group's leader. Though Hamid and Tamir received a salary from Kadir and were reliant on him for their contracts, including the one at the palm island, they maintained a separate identity as a partnership of independent contractors. Their business card, for instance, listed their names and contact information prominently, but nowhere gave Kadir's information.

While Hamid's ongoing work at the palm island was part of a bid that looked increasingly unlikely to succeed—as I describe in further detail below—he talked to the men in the courtyard that night as if it had been won. He falsely described how he managed a crew of twenty, and suggested vaguely that he might need more soon. That suggestion seemed to correlate with an assessment Kadir expressed to me days earlier, about the workers he would need to recruit for the palm island project *if* they won the contract. Hamid ended by referring to various partners he knew in the project, which seemed part of an effort to promote himself as well-connected. While

Hamid stressed that his group currently did not need assistance, the two men asked him to remember them and contact them if he needed to hire workers in the future.

I interpret Hamid's mostly-dismissive attitude toward the men that night as a desire to project his personal control over the business. But I argue that his attitude also reflected a selective preference, and a feeling of superiority among Kadir's group in general, based on the group's particular communal identity. All five members were part of the same *Sayyid* lineage,[46] having traced their descent through the same Shia Imam, and were native to the same north India village. On this occasion in the mosque courtyard, and in other meetings with members of the broader diverse Shia community in Dubai, Hamid seemed to attempt to defend the group's particular *Sayyid* identity. More generally, their self-assured and exaggerated assessments of their work performance aimed to project a sense of felt "superiority" befitting their *Sayyid* status.[47]

In another example from months earlier, I brought another friend Latif, a non-*Sayyid* Pathan from Pakistan's FATA tribal region to meet Kadir's group. Latif operated a small "technical services" group in Dubai—providing services to repair in-home machinery and appliances—and I suggested that he might try to collaborate with Kadir and his group. Latif and the others in his group were polite but distrustful. At one point, Latif asked if Hamid and his friends were Bihari:

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[46] In Islam, a *Sayyid* lineage is one traced back through male relatives to the Prophet's male grandchildren (and to the Prophet himself through his daughter Fatimah). Twelver Shia *Sayyid*s often distinguish among lineages based on the Imam from whom their descent begins; many then adopt the name of that Imam as their surname. *Sayyid*s who acknowledge descent from a particular Imam often cluster together in communities in particular villages and localities in India and Pakistan. To protect my informants' identities, I do not name their particular lineage here.

[47] For a investigation into the place of *Sayyid* identities across various Muslim community, historically and in the present-day, see the volume edited by Kazuo Morimoto (2012).

referencing an Indian state often reputed for its underdevelopment, a label that implied unrefinement in the expatriate community. They indignantly replied that they were *Sayyid*, and to further convey the quality and high-standards of their work they opened the book of designs and showed him a few representative images—though as I described in the beginning section of the chapter, those designs bore little resemblance to the work I observed them to actually perform.

Aspiration and the imaginative telos of development.

Recent anthropological work on "cosmopolitanism" and aspiration do not project a "world without borders" so much as a "world full of borders" that individuals strive to "overcome" (Schielke 2012, 30; see also Leal 2011; Majumder 2012). The role of imagination as an important dimension of modern life (Appadurai 1996, 2-11), itinerant life (Pandolfo 1997, 182-185; Crapanzano 2004, 13-18), and in the constructed space of modern nations (Anderson 2006; Van Der Veer 1995) has also been argued for. Two significant ethnographically-based accounts in post-colonial spaces of South Asia provide visions of imagination and aspiration as processes of becoming (in the Bergsonian sense). Drawing on the agrarian lives of a criminal caste in Tamil Nadu, Anand Pandian contrasts the moral perfectionism internal to colonial models of development—models based on a teleological view of history and progress—with peasant modes of reimagining modernity and progress as vested in the materiality (for instance, aging machinery) of peasant life (Pandian 2009, 8, 17-23). Pandian finds resonance between the type of developmental imagining he observes in southern India and Benjamin's sense of experience as a

"process of unfolding," as well as Bergson's sense of maturation as a process of "creating oneself endlessly" (Pandian 2011, 169). Similarly Naveeda Khan draws on a Bergsonian sense of "time as becoming" to understand the formation of Pakistan as a perpetual coming into being—a part of overlapping self, social, and state projects of "becoming Muslim" (Khan 2012, 5-10). In both Pandian's notion of development and Khan's of aspiration, "process" and movement are foregrounded.

The idea of reimagining development processes in terms germane to peasant experience resonates with my understanding of how certain Urdu-speaking expatriates in Dubai appropriate and vest development processes in aspects of what I call minority experience. As the above examples from my fieldwork suggest, businessmen in this community in a variety of ways are excluded from participation in Dubai's large-scale economies of remunerative aggrandizement, and thus forge a virtual sense of participation that runs astride the formal/dominant economy and gains ground in the work of imagination. This virtual economy forges real financial relationships among members of the community, most materially by the informal exchange of credit. But it also limits participants' ability to "deal" with others in the formal/mainstream economy. I hope to show how business deals are affected by participation in these aspirational/virtual economies, by drawing on my experience with this group of interior designers.

Generally, I see such regimes of aspiration as inhibited and driven by internal instabilities. Khan identifies skepticism as both a byproduct and counterforce to aspiration in lay Muslim everyday life. Khan describes an anxiety among some Muslim leaders that when lay Muslims indulge excessively in deliberative

disputation and debate they will shirk their social and religious duties and ritual obligations (Khan 2012, 12-14). Skepticism in the work of Veena Das (2007) (on which Khan draws), is in one way the doubt that one can know the pain of another, a problem which the rituals and languages of mourning help overcome, returning remote experiences of pain and violence to the everyday world, bridging between "the distant shore and the everyday shore in which violence and grief are met" (Das 2007, 57-58).

The notion of a destabilizing force conjoined to striving/development, which Khan develops to theorize life in Pakistan, adds depth to how I understand economic aspiration in Dubai. Rather than a loss of ritual action caused by excessive imagining and "abstract thinking," participants and observers I talked to in this Shia community mourned the loss of an original form of sociality—a sense of how to correctly engage materially with others—which is forfeited by participating in this virtual/aspirational economy. This is akin to the loss of local forms of valuation that Julia Elyachar identifies in Cairo when working class communities enter the free marketplace (Elyachar 2005, 8). In the fears of Pakistan's *'ulamā'*[48] and the observers and participants of Dubai's virtual economy, aspiration imperils one's social and sensorial relations to the world. A decline in everyday social relations, if not in the sensoriality of ritual practice itself, is at stake.

To examine the disconnections achieved caused by participation in the virtual economy I outline in the section below a series of pursued business deals I

[48] (sg. *alim*), traditionally those trained as Islamic legal scholars. In Pakistan and India, they are conventionally known as respected preachers from elite families who have finished their seminary education, contrasted (and sometimes in conflict with) less educated preachers, often from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, popularly known as mullahs.

observed. In the section following, I detail how a robust cycle of credit and debt within the community (in which I became implicated) is an aspect of aspirational modes of being, in which, as various people attested, promises of repayment frequently go unmet. It is in this context of participating in unmet promises that I later came to see Hamid's creative attribution in his photo portfolio as an expression of both aspiration and desperation.

High expectations, failed deals: part one.

Kadir was late middle aged and had been working in Dubai for over 20 years. In five years he had recruited Hamid and the other workers all from his native village in India, through friend and kin connections. Kadir has a family in India, including a wife and son, whom he often talked to from his room's computer by Skype, and on a few occasions also introduced to me. When my two other close contacts from India first introduced me to him in January 2012, they asked me to pray for him, as the group had endured a sustained period of financial woe, that stemmed from a dearth of new work, and also, as I found out later, from large debts owed to others in the Urdu (and likely Urdu Shia) community in Dubai.

While our relationship was based on some mutual admiration, by late February 2012 I was trying to find ways to make myself useful to the group to gain access to observe them on their contract jobs. When the opportunity for a new deal for them arose at a large construction site in Abu Dhabi, I offered my assistance to help translate in the negotiation (Kadir's English was poor) and to generally advocate for him, in exchange for accompanying him on the site visit. He accepted,

but made other statements in the coming days that seemed to envision a greater role for me. He said on one occasion that he wanted me to manage the workers, in exchange for which he would pay me a percentage of profits. I again expressed my commitment to my ongoing education in the United States, and my research in Dubai.

In March, I accompanied Kadir and Junaid on their visit to Abu Dhabi for the negotiation. A little over an hour into the car journey to the site, Kadir stopped us at a roadside *ḍhābā*, or Indo-Pakistani restaurant, where he ordered and paid for an expensive lunch. The worksite for which they had been recruited was a nearly-finished new construction on the outskirts of Abu Dhabi city, along an artificially constructed canal. The dusty road gave way to the wide waterway and then to the imposing construction, mostly sealed with glass and gleaming in the midday light, but with some upper floors still exposed as the work continued. The building was to be an international luxury hotel, Kadir had explained to me on our drive that day.

Construction at the site was coordinated by a Chinese firm, and initially a middle-aged Chinese women and her young assistant met us outside a trailer near the site when we arrived. A Pakistani foreman soon arrived. He was a young man who spoke fluent English and seemed to be a friend of Junaid. I later understood that he had arranged the bid meeting between the Chinese supervisor and Kadir at Junaid's urging. The supervisor directed the foreman and her Chinese assistant to give us a tour of the site and describe the work that Kadir would need to fulfill.

We boarded a service elevator and ascended several floors, getting off at a high floor that was busy with men in blue jumpsuits, mostly from Bangladesh, as the

foreman explained. The assistant addressed one apparently Bangladeshi worker in Mandarin, who gave a halting but spirited reply. Our group and the worker laughed, and the assistant congratulated him for his effort to learn and speak his language.

Around a few more corners, where men worked to fix drywall around some exposed metal beams, we arrived at a row of rooms along a hallway, which had exposed concrete floors but was otherwise mostly-finished. The rooms had most furnishings and installations already completed: toilets and showerheads were installed, the floors were of tile and marble, walls were painted white, and wooden paneling near the windows and a built-in wooden desktops in the corners had been installed. Still the rooms seemed poorly kept: a thick layer of grey dust had formed on the marble floor through which various trails of boot-prints ran. The toilet of the first room we viewed appeared to have been damaged after being installed: the porcelain was cracked along the top and handle apparently broken. They had likely not been used, I thought (since water service had not yet been connected through the building) but rather had been mistreated. The dust on the floor and on the fixtures indicated that some time had passed since their installation.

We approached the woodwork, and it too had apparent damage. The panel was warped, with the finish on one side chipping off. As they looked over the room, the assistant handed Kadir and Junaid a worksheet listing the range of repairs for which Kadir would be contracted, describing existing damages in over 100 guest rooms like the one before us. He explained that the previous contractor who had installed the woodwork had made mistakes in many of the rooms. He pointed out

some of the obvious flaws and explained that, though the room was worse than most, the problems in the others were similar.

Kadir carefully examined the woodwork paneling and desktop. He approvingly noted to Junaid the "quality" of the wood ("*quality bahut he*"). He then explained, and Junaid translated in English, that in order to fix it he would have to remove the piece and reinstall the anchoring to "reset" the woodwork properly. It would take some time, he cautioned. But he assured the assistant he had experience with this kind of work. The assistant seemed pleased and assured by Kadir's commitment. He led us back into the hallway and showed us a few more rooms with similar problems.

Having gone through the details to the mutual satisfaction of Kadir and the assistant, we reboarded the elevator to return to the supervisor's trailer for negotiations. On the way back down, Kadir and the Chinese assistant joked with the Indian elevator operator, in some basic English. Kadir seemed hopeful and confident going into the negotiations with the supervisor. Arriving back at the trailer from which we started our tour, the supervisor invited us into her office, which was cluttered with various equipment and numerous filing cabinets. Kadir and Junaid sat down in front of her desk, while I sat slightly off to one side, and the supervisor's assistant stood attentively behind her.

The conversation began in friendly tones: it seemed to me that the supervisor was as eager for a deal as Kadir was. She explained how the project faced pressure to reach completion soon, as work had fallen behind schedule. Upon beginning to discuss price, however, the tone of the negotiation quickly changed. Looking over

the sheet, talking through the work again with the supervisor, and then after consulting with Junaid aside, Kadir offered his price of 100,000 dirhams (AED) for the full work. The supervisor appeared aghast. Kadir quickly tried to explain, while Junaid helped to translate, that his intention was to remove, correct, and carefully reinstall all the misfit and warped woodwork. The supervisor countered with her contention that the damages were mostly superficial, and quickly offered 25,000 AED as payment instead. "It's just touch-ups," she implored repeatedly, with some exasperation, as she made a paint-brushing gesture in the air with her hand, suggesting that the damage called only for concealment.

Kadir reacted with both disappointment and frustration. He shook his head in some disbelief, reacting to her counter offer and agitation. Junaid intervened and politely tried to argue the need for more substantive repairs, but the again the supervisor scoffed. She called them both "crazy" for expecting their price in light of (in her view) the modest work required. After a bit more back and forth "negotiation" over the details, the gap in their expectations was only slightly bridged: the supervisor offered 30,000 and Kadir reduced his bid to 85,000.

In a final bid to save the negotiation, the supervisor partially accepted Kadir's desire to provide detailed repair, with a more modest offer to fix only 10-15 rooms with the worst damage. It would likely require only one week of work and two workers from his crew, she suggested. She presented it as quick transaction with Kadir group, for which she would pay 7,000 AED. Clearly, the offer undercut Kadir's hope and expectation to secure a large work contract, and he seemed dejected. In the end, however, he offered to think about it and reply later. As they shook hands

the supervisor seemed hopeful that a quick and simple transaction could be made, while Kadir appeared deflated by the day's outcome.

In my notes that night I reflected on my surprise that Kadir would be so willing to give up even a modest deal, given what appeared to be the group's desperate financial state. I also wondered whether the construction project itself was over-budget and facing financial pressure or in disarray, given that the work to be done involved correcting another contractor's mistake, which still suggested a failure of supervision. Perhaps such late-phase construction work—such as the "finishing" work that Kadir's team specializes in—is often burdened by limitations of over-extended budgets.

Two hotels have since opened on the large site on which he bid for work (see Image 3.1). Two weeks after the negotiation I learned that Kadir had turned down the supervisor's more modest work offer. On the drive back to Dubai that day, I tried to ask why he was uninterested in the smaller deal, or alternatively, why he was unwilling to compromise more on the price for the larger deal. The gap between the offers for the larger deal was too great, Kadir and Junaid both explained, and the more modest contract would not be worth the back-and-forth travel time, though he said he had hoped to house two of his workers at the site long-term for the larger project, to reduce some of these travel costs—perhaps another indication of his inflated and grandiose vision for the project generally. Later, when the scale of Kadir's business-related debts became clearer to me, I also appreciated that only a more substantial remuneration would have allowed him to pay off some of his large and overdue loans. Finally, I further speculated at the time that his pride, as both an

Image 3.1: A photo of the hotel in Abu Dhabi as pictured at left, around 2015. The artificial canal is in the foreground, but no any other major constructions are visible in the vicinity. Image available online [accessed December 9, 2015]: http://media-cdn.tripadvisor.com/media/photo-s/05/36/bc/b8/novotel-abu-dhabi-gate.jpg

experienced businessman in Dubai, and as a craftsman, had perhaps been hurt by the supervisor, who had loudly and gesticulatively scoffed at his bid offer, called him and Junaid "crazy," and had seemed to not take him seriously.

After more reflection, I thought of another aspect of Kadir's approach that probably negatively impacted the deal. In negotiating, Kadir defended—perhaps stubbornly, and against his business's best financial interests—a commitment and loyalty to the "craftsmanship" of his work. "Why would they install high quality wood so poorly," Junaid wondered aloud on our drive home, in an aside to longer conversation he had with Kadir, which began on the project, and wound around to a

discussion of Imam Ali. The prospect which most excited Kadir—carefully repairing and restoring quality woodwork as a "finishing" phase of an already imposing and gleaming high-end luxury construction—eluded him in the negotiation. The lure of working on and with quality materials, to properly fix and preserve them, inspired him to value his own labor beyond what the supervisor was willing to pay. The materials themselves helped inspire an inflated conception of the project for Kadir, ultimately to the detriment of the deal.

High expectations, failed deals: part two.

In the weeks after the failed Abu Dhabi deal, I followed up other research threads. When I returned to the designers' room in April, excitement for a new bid appeared to have displaced any lingering disappointment from the loss of the Abu Dhabi project. Kadir explained it was an even bigger project, at a major new apartment construction in the rapidly developing section of south Dubai, called Dubai Marina. He explained that the group has been preparing a "model apartment" to display their "finishing" work (painting and polishing) to the management of the complex. If approved, they would win the contract to finish over two hundred other apartments in the development.

Days later, I accompanied Kadir, Hamid, and Samir from the core group and a young Bangladeshi man that Kadir had hired as a cleaner and equipment manager to the Dubai Marina site. The apartment complex appeared to be mostly completed, and a few units were already occupied. The complex lay at the base of the of a fully constructed island just off the Arabian Sea coastline, famously made in the shape of

palm tree, visible from fly-over and satellite perspectives. Hamid briefly showed me through the apartment. We ended on the balcony, where he pointed out an elevated monorail track running just behind the building: the infrastructure of a new transit system designed to increase access to the island by both residents and visiting tourists (see Image 3.2).

The work appeared relatively unlaborious; I watch at first while Kadir led Hamid around apartment, pointing out various blemishes in the finishing on a few wooden doors and kitchen cabinets. As they went through, Hamid painted over trouble spots, wielding a brush and can of finishing polish. Later I watched as Samir

Image 3.2: Photograph taken from apartment balcony, looking onto the Palm Jumeira Monorail, April 2012. Photo by author

and the Bangladeshi helper worked as a team, the helper laying down adhesive tape to protect the wall while Samir applied wood polish to the wooden baseboard. The helper would then remove the tape again, leaving large wads piled on the floor (see Images 3.3-3.5).

After a few hours of light work, the group packed up and left. Early the next week, Kadir called me in the early morning, explained that the negotiation had been moved up to that day, and invited me to join him. When we met we were quickly joined by an older Pakistani man whom Kadir described as a technical services expert and a potential partner and collaborator on the deal. As we drove to the site, Kadir expressed concern that the work had not been completed to his satisfaction, as the date had been suddenly moved forward and he had not had time for another return visit with his team. Still, he expressed confidence in the deal, and spoke expectantly about its scale, worth a few "million" dirhams. The group would need to mobilize vast resources. He described a process where I could help him recruit more contract workers from India to handle the contract's large-scale demand.

We arrived and waited for the site manager in the lobby of the building. The doorman would not give us the key for the model apartment, when Kadir requested it. Suddenly, a young couple rushed in from the street. The woman, who was white and British, requested the keys from the doorman, who appeared to be Filipino, and he hesitated. She yelled at him and he recoiled a bit, then meekly produced the keys. She loudly remarked to her partner that the staff "need to be trained." Kadir and his partner humbly interjected and introduced themselves, as the couple made their way to the elevator. We all rode up to the apartment together. To our surprise, other

Image 3.3: Kadir and Hamid preparing a model apartment for a contract bid in south Dubai, April 2012. Photo by author.

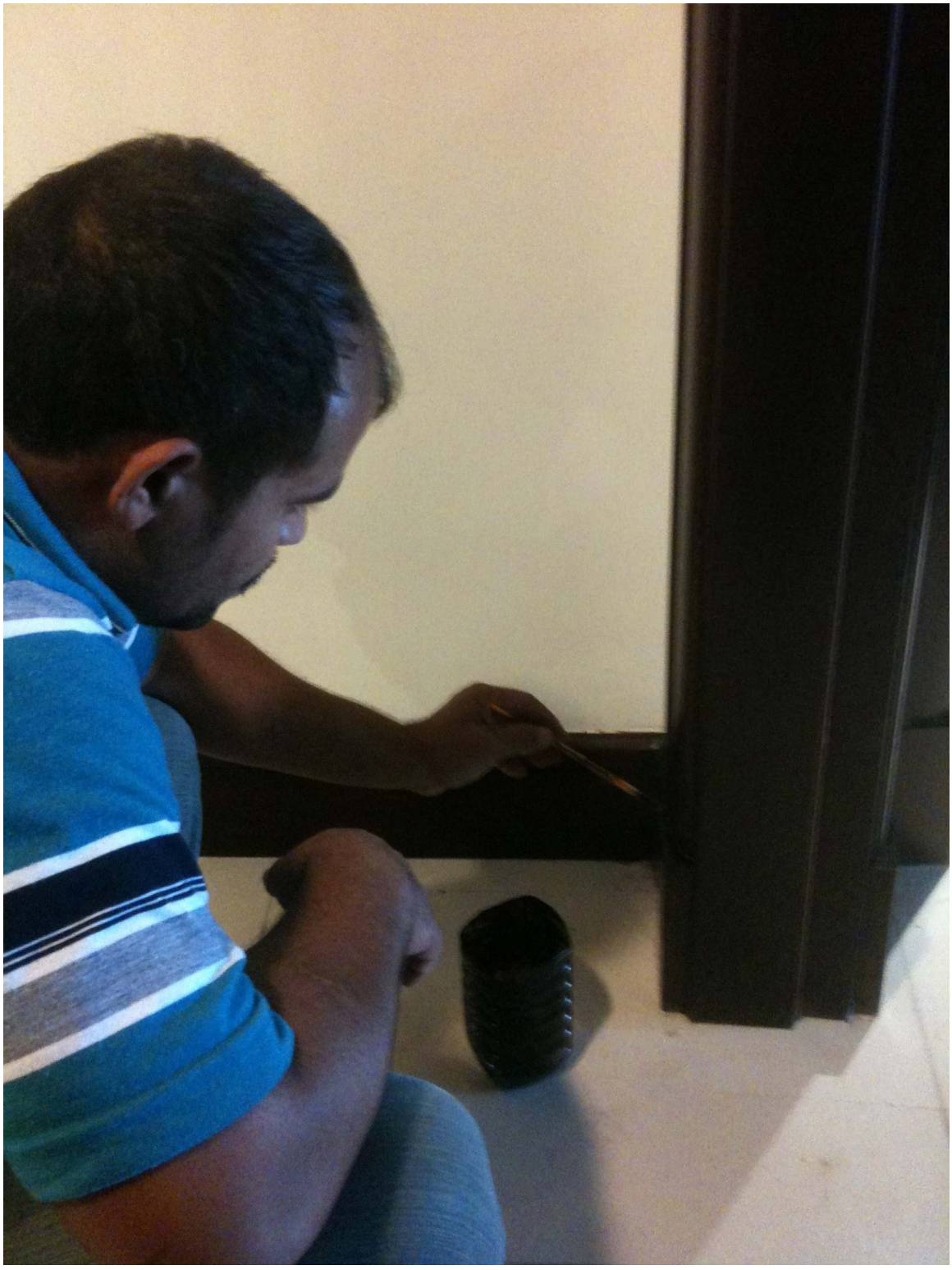

Image 3.4: Samir applying finishing polish to a wood baseboard at model apartment, April 2012. Photo by author.

Image 3.5: Samir's helper removing masking tape after Samir applied the finish, at model apartment, April 2012. Photo by author.

people were already waiting outside the room, including another team of finishing contractors led by young Indian man.

The manager and her partner, who was British-Indian, examined the work that Kadir and the other team had modeled in the apartment. She quickly launched into complaints. The problems, in her view, were twofold: it had taken far too long (over two months, since she last saw the apartment) to get a small amount of work done, and despite that the work was shoddy. At one point, she said "we are not fitting a shack here"—a remark I interpreted as racist toward Kadir and the other Asian workers involved in the negotiation.[49]

She focused much attention on the heavy wooden front door. The touch-ups to the door were made in a different color or quality of finishing polish, she complained. Frustrated that Kadir and others might not understand the problem, she tried to explain it to me. Meanwhile, her partner talked to Kadir and the others, and communicated back that the polish did match the quality of the door, but that any touch up would fail to fully blend. To solve it, the door had to be removed and fully treated with spray paint and sealant. "Well can they do that?", she blurted to her partner. Yes, they can do anything, he said, but it would take more time, as they would have to take it back to their work area. Frustrated by the prospect of extra time, she asked why they could not apply the finishing treatment on balcony, and they answered that would be impossible because the air-born sand would interfere and adhere to the wet door.

[49] In documenting the experience of Asian migrant workers in the Gulf, many anthropologists have emphasized pervasive forms of racism, overt and tacit, that this community contend with, as an aspect of "asymmetrical" power relations (Longva 2009, 129, 155; see also Vora 2013; Mahdavi 2011; Kanna 2011; Gardner 2010; Sarmadi 2013).

In the end, she agreed to allow Kadir and his team more time to spray paint and reseal all doors. The meeting concluded on that note, and Kadir appeared again to have failed to seal a deal that he had eagerly anticipated. A week later, Kadir and I drove to pick up Hamid and Tamir at the same site, where they had been spray-painting and sealing the doors on the model unit, in an increasingly quixotic pursuit of a contract. As of May, when the group and I ceased contact, they had not yet secured a deal on the remaining work at the complex. Months later, as I left Dubai at the end of my fieldwork, the group still lived in the same small room, having apparently failed to achieve any grandscale improvement in their quality of life, or signs of visible enrichment.

As a coda: by late April, with the deal on the Dubai Marina apartment project still unresolved, Kadir seemed increasingly desperate. Others in the community were trying to collect on loans they had given him, he explained to me at one point. In recent weeks, his workers had asked me for loans on two occasions, initially as much as 20,000 AED (or just over $5,000 USD). On the day before my incident of "falling-out" with Kadir (described below) he invited me to come along with him to purchase gypsum supplies for a smaller villa renovation job that his employees were working on in the middle-upper income, Jumeira section of Dubai. His supplier was based in Ajman, over an hour's drive from "middle" Dubai, and a bit longer in the mid-afternoon traffic we encountered. Again, he seemed to anticipate a simple transaction: these guys knew him and would give him a good deal, he explained to me on the drive to the shop.

The shop was discretely signed from outside, and the inside was divided into a small indoor office area and a larger courtyard area partially covered by plastic roofing. Along the walls, and stacked in long rows on one side, were a wide variety of decorative gypsum pieces (see Image 3.6). A work area was littered with molds and mixing basins, while another area was stacked high with large gypsum powder bags (see Images 3.7-3.8). While the shop sold both ready-made gypsum-work and raw gypsum powder, Kadir had no way of making or designing the pieces himself. His reliance on ready-made materials seemed to undermine the group's claim of being "designers" and of any claim of ownership of the designs that appeared in their workbook.

Image 3.6: Gypsum pieces, stored and on display, in the courtyard of a shop in Ajman, U.A.E., April 2012. Photo by author

Image 3.7: Molding area at gypsum supply store in Ajman, April 2012. Photo by author

Image 3.8: Raw gypsum in stacked bags at gypsum store in Ajman, April 2012. Photo by author.

Rancor between Kadir and the shop manager developed soon after we arrived. It seemed that Kadir owed him money from his previous visit. The manager asked with incredulity and sarcasm, "did you bring money this time." Kadir proceeded to tussle with him—a fellow Urdu-speaking Indian immigrant—at one point taunting him by threatening to poor hot tea on his desk. At one point Kadir appeared indignant, struck a managerial pose of superiority, sitting in the manager's desk chair and mocking his authority by commanding him to retrieve the gypsum skirting he desired. In the end, he slowly and carefully measured out 40 dirhams (approx. 11 USD) in notes from his wallet—with some consternation, and for

dramatic effect—and handed it to the manager. In exchange he got considerably less gypsum skirting than he expected and needed, per his detailed explanation to me on the car-drive there.

While the setting and stakes of this interaction were smaller scale than the previous deal negotiations I chronicled above, this one fit the pattern of a sharp relief between Kadir's imagined-in-advance scenarios and the actually-enacted outcomes. In this deal, like the others, he faced vocal derision from the opposing negotiating parties, rather than respect. Before we left, as Kadir wandered through the workshop, appearing to inspect the gypsum-work, the manager leaned into me and said "you know he's a fool (*be-vaquf*), right?" I shrugged.

Giving: loans, gifts, moral contracts, social relations.

Development projects in Dubai continue to demand significant contracted labor for unskilled and semi-skilled services, which are provided by large populations of immigrant workers from South and East Asia, especially the Philippines, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Despite the large demand—and the abundance of work for small companies that provide interior design work, technical services, and cleaning services—large contracts such as the ones Kadir's group pursued can be hard to secure, given the upfront costs necessary to make a bid competitive. Kadir described to me how, earlier in 2011, the group had won a large contract for finishing work, but were unable to take it because they could not amass the requisite up-front money that the contract demanded; to cover, for instance, supply costs, pay workers' wages, and insure the group while on the job.

U.A.E.-based banks offer small business loans to expatriates as a matter of policy, but in practice companies like Kadir's stand little chance to win them. As journalistic analysis reveals, banks seek prestigious "big name" borrowers.[50] Also absent in the Emirates are the community-level engines of microcredit lending pervasive in the subcontinent, which aim to support small-scale business needs through personal loans.[51] The unavailability of formal credit options produces a demand for service work and contracted semi-skilled construction work that exceeds labor supply. It also results in a robust economy of lending through informal kin and friend networks that buoys businesses like Kadir's, but which also imperils social relations and participants' standings in the community, implicating both borrowers and lenders. Awesome examples of wealth (and iconic architecture), coupled with the allure, in borrowing, of gaining something without apparent expenditure, creates the virtual world of aspiration that Kadir and other expatriates enter into in Dubai.

Beginning with my interactions with Kadir's group, and in further interactions mostly in later phases of fieldwork, I was approached by various people in the Shia expatriate community, my "target" research community, who requested loans from me. Through conversations with others about loans, directly and indirectly, I caught glimpses of the wider networks of informal lending among friends and kin extending through this community. Nadim, for instance, once asked me for a loan on behalf of Asgar, whose family in Pakistan faced mounting debt

[50] See Martina Fuchs and Martin Dokoupil, "UAE small businesses face tight lending conditions." *Reuters (online)*. Available at http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/02/14/emirates-lending-sme-idINLDE71D1FZ20110214

[51] For analysis of these enterprises, see for instance Rahman (1999) and Huq (2004).

following the recent death of his father. I offered, as a rationale against giving loans to my participants, that a reasonable timeframe for repayment would likely exceed my research tenure in Dubai.

With this in mind, I asked Sharif, who worked at a higher-paying job than Nadim or Asgar, whether he could give Asgar a loan. He said he was already over-extended, with two outstanding loans to members of the community, one of which extended back years. He smiled as he explained this last detail to me, perhaps realizing that it confirmed the outcome I hoped to avoid. His smile also perhaps acknowledged that a long-deferred loan may have in fact become a "gift:" to expect repayment now would be a delusion.

Still, to suppose that a "loan" operates in this community merely as a euphemism for a "gift"—that when a loan is requested and transacted among peers there is little expectation to return it—is an oversimplification. That conclusion would ignore the painful and emotional burden I noted both the "receivers" and the "lenders/gifters" felt at different times in the loan's lifecycle, as well as the moral and Islamic codes that they discuss. On the latter point, shortly after my contact with Kadir and his group ceased, Junaid introduced me to an aspiring entrepreneur from Pakistan, who could give me his perspective on the business climate in Dubai. Meeting him at a restaurant, he began by talking about the status of Dubai's re-export economy. Given policies that limit the direct export of Indian and Pakistani goods to the U.S., he enthusiastically described the potential for businesses to route goods through U.A.E., on their way from Pakistan to United States, as a go-around solution.

Speaking to me in English, he asked if I had any ideas for such a U.S.-import business. If I did, he could provide crucial "support from Pakistan" for me, to mobilize the necessary resources for the venture, he explained hopefully. I explained that I hadn't thought about it and didn't have any particular ideas, but he persisted. At one point, to demonstrate the ease with which he preferred to conduct business, he told me that he never secured deals with signed contracts. Instead, gesturing with his hand, he said "I put my hand to Qur'an. If you know what that means, you can trust me."

As I continued to express my disinclination to start a business, his enthusiasm waned toward the end of our conversation. Outside the restaurant, we walked through the streets of Bur Dubai, and he started to describe how difficult his financial situation was. He feared he might have to leave Dubai. Jobless for months, and with a wife and two children back home in Pakistan, he had been evicted from his former "bachelor's" room because he could no longer pay rent, and now stayed with a friend in a neighboring area. In the end, he asked me for a "donation," and I gave him a small sum of Dirhams from what I had in my pocket. He thanked me, and we agreed to stay in contact; then he turned somberly and walked off.

If the security of a written contract lies in the way it "tethers" a person (the borrower) and an event (the assent to and "signing" of an agreement) to a material document that is perpetuated into the future, the security of an *oral* agreement lies in the "presence" of the person in the utterance . Thus, an oral agreement invokes, relies on, and often overburdens social relations. Gestures such as a handshake may forge or strengthen a social relationship by further drawing in the body of the

borrower in the agreement. Alternatively, gestures such as putting one's hand on or toward the Qur'an both invoke one's general imperative to ethical action in Islam, and strengthens the relationship between lender and borrower by invoking their shared membership in the social community of Muslims.

Still, Bill Maurer has documented the rise of industries around Muslim lending, in places such as the United States, the popularity of which reveal an increasing sophistication among Muslim consumers and investors, and a preference for physically signed and sealed contracts over oral ones:

> Scholarly endorsement is not the equivalent of personal charisma. People prefer the greater anonymity afforded by standardized forms, credit checks, and standardized "shari'a seals of approval" over the handshake and the social connections that come from dealing with other Muslims. They want to be treated like "real clients," not just like Muslims. (Maurer 2006, 13)

To generalize on this idea: a loan transaction immediately creates a disbalanced relationship. The preference for written-contract loans reflects, on the one hand, a borrower's desire to *preserve* and separate social relations from the potential adverse effects of a deferred or failed loan repayment. Conversely, a preference for an informal loan, such as Junaid's friend suggested above, could imply the borrower's disregard for his relationship with the would-be lender, or put differently: his calculation that the loan's value is worth the relationship's potential loss. In the logic of James Scott's analysis of class and social tensions in Malaysia, this relates to an assessment of the reputational "cost of a bad name," in terms of one's social standing and financial reliance on others (Scott 2008, 24).

Reciprocity and ethnographic relationships.

In a section above, I stress how my relationship with Kadir and his team developed, as did many of my research relationships, around a sense of sharing, generosity, and good will. However, in a pattern also similar to some of my other research relationships, Kadir seemed to evaluate our relationship as a calculation about what could be gained, in an all-or-nothing gamble where the loss of our relationship was a realistic potential outcome. The turn our relationship took, as Kadir and his employees seemed increasingly intent to extract monetary loans and gifts from me, impacted me as a quandary and crisis, given that I admired the group, sympathized with their struggle, and appreciated their kindness and generosity toward me. They had, for instance, fed me meals and given me access to their work and downtime interactions for my research. Having worked closely with them, I had come to feel invested in their financial and work struggles, and wanted to help them.

Kadir had acknowledged the broader network of social relations at stake in borrowing money, and in requesting a large loan from me. In a conversation with me in the car returning from the gypsum-supply store, he described how asking friends or relatives for money carried embarrassment and shame—projecting to them a sense of being an unsuccessful manager, and of "failure" ("*nākāmī*"). The prospect of ruining a relationship with a friend or relative, which could have a ripple effect through the community, damaging his reputation, makes such efforts to borrow or lend perilous. Borrowing from a close but outside (non-kin, non-

community, non-Indian) acquaintance like me, however, would avoid the potential ripple effect of reputation damage, should something go wrong.[52]

Specifically, borrowing from me would allow Kadir to repay others to whom he was in debt. In an earlier candid meeting one night in his room, he had admitted that his group had not had a major deal since he had moved their base of operations from an interior city in Abu Dhabi to Dubai three years ago. Some of his biggest debts were with old friends and business associates from that community. Just days before our trip to the gypsum retailers, I overheard him in a cell phone conversation with someone whom he later described as an old associate from that city. In the call, he described deals and capital that were about to come his way ("*pēsa āne wāla he*," he said repeatedly), in an effort, as I understood later, to reassure the lender.

Hamid was the first of Kadir's employees to ask me for money, on an occasion weeks before I appreciated the full picture of Kadir's debts. Hamid's bold question initially caught me off guard: asking how much money I had. I vaguely said I had little, and stressed that I was a student and unemployed in Dubai. Still, he likely assumed I had access to a great deal of money, as he first asked me for 20,000 dirhams (about $5,500). In the moment, and in the days after, I reflected on and reconsidered my approach to "reciprocity" in fieldwork. The need for some form of compensation to participants is an issue for any human-subjects researcher.

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[52] This is perhaps a reverse phenomenon from that which Clara Han (2012) observes in an economically vulnerable community in Santiago, Chile. In her analysis, times of economic precarity force community members to request small loans or material assistance from extended family members, requests which effect the borrower's shame, but which are generally repaid and do not strain relationships. By contrast, to target friends and acquaintances for credit is more fraught, as it risks the appearance of "begging" for money. Thus, in this community (notwithstanding its structural and socioeconomic differences with the Urdu Shia community in Dubai), the closer the relation to the lender, the more tenable the transaction.

Ethnographers, I believed then and now, are better positioned to give gifts rather than loans in exchange for research participation, often unable to give the time that lending cycles require. Days later we had reduced the loan amount to 2,000 dirhams ($550), an amount I cautiously resolved to give. However just as we were about to execute the transaction, Kadir seemed to subtly change the terms of the repayment period, and I backed out of the deal as gracefully as I could.

Thereafter I resolved to not give loans, though I did subsequently give small monetary "gifts" (in the range of 50-100 dirhams, $14-$28) on occasion to informants when they expressed need. In principle, I figured that lending on a false premise of repayment would mark me as someone easily manipulated, thereby complicating (and potentially further monetizing) my research relationships with others. I adopted this policy partly on the advice of a few other trusted contacts in the expatriate community, who themselves had lent money to others that was never repaid. Such ventures resulted in the fracture of several of their relationships.

I was unaware then, in April, how integrated into the informal credit economy my research relationships would become, and how central it would be to my understanding of expatriate participation in Dubai's development. On the last day we spoke, Kadir again asked me for 1,800 dirhams, which I again declined to give. Later that night he called me and, in a belligerent and yelling tone, essentially "told me off," and called me a "fraud:" "*tum achhā admi nahīṅ ho. Bilkul fraud admi he*." I was still reeling from the conversation minutes later when Tamir followed-up with a call to me. His tone was more restrained at first, seeming to apologize for Kadir's call, while providing some context. He explained that when I had declined to

loan the money to Kadir that day, Kadir was apparently forced to tell this friend that he had failed to raise the cash to repay him. His friend had yelled at Kadir, Tamir explained. But then, Tamir's tone shifted as well, and he seemed to accuse me of stealing items from their room. When I stressed that I had not taken them, he vowed to call the police to resolve the matter. I discovered later through a mutual friend that Tamir and Hamid had apparently also suspected his neighbors of the alleged theft, and they had just had a loud confrontation outside their room.

Shaken after the two calls, I reached out to Latif, who was then a close contact of mine and someone I had previously introduced to Kadir. Latif seemed to sympathize. "In the world, there are many who will take advantage of you," he cautioned in our phone conversation that night. He advised me to avoid them, and to not give loans to anyone. Less than three months later, I was thus surprised when Latif came to me asking for an 8,000 AED ($2,178 USD) loan for his technical services business. "If you want to help me, you can help me," he exclaimed, provocatively, after I hesitated. I again declined the loan, but tried hard to help facilitate new jobs for him, and assisted him on a few as well. My failure to give the loan, nonetheless, strained our relationship, and our contact diminished.

As Asian expatriates, with little demonstrable wealth or assets in Dubai, people like Kadir stand little chance of securing loans from agencies such as banks. Furthermore, various informants bemoaned the physical displacement of migrant life which sometimes caused a rupture in the moral conventions particular to social life in India and Pakistan: a phenomenon highlighted in some situations of informal lending. One night shortly after my fall-out with Kadir's group, I met Junaid outside

the mosque, who offered me some consoling perspective. He described in English to me how people in Dubai adopt a "bad nature:" that they act differently and forget how to be gregarious and "helpful to others" as they would otherwise be in Pakistan.

Islamic gift-giving traditions.

Of course, conventions of lending in Dubai are not only structured by increasingly-influential frameworks advanced by "Islamic finance" enterprises, broadly defined. Muslims observe a variety of alms giving practices, structured around the obligation to serve the needy, both locally and globally, and both inside and outside the Islamic community. In this context, a loan that goes unrepaid, and that overtime becomes a gift, can be rationalized by the lender/giver as a form of charity. Compensation can then be found in the *ṣawāb* or spiritual reward God may grant for such an act, building on my analysis of efforts to cultivate beneficial actions among members of this community, in Chapter 1.

The spirit of giving to the needy is represented in various Islamic institutions including *zakāt* and the Shia tax on business profits, *k̲h̲ums*. Outside of these formal obligations, I followed a variety of everyday requests for generosity in this community, and also noted the burden "needy" members bore to not only adequately demonstrate their need, but also to appropriately request aid. Hamdan's email digest, for instance (described in Chapter 1), created a marketplace for "free of cost" items directed toward "any momin[53] in need," and often explicitly asked potential recipients to "advise" why the item should be "given to you." To encourage

[53] A term translating as "believers," in this context usually meant to imply Shia followers specifically.

giving, one such email included two quotations. The first was attributed to First Shia Imam, Ali ibn Talib: “Take initiative in charitable acts and don't consider them insignificant, for its little is great and its few is many.” The second was taken from Qur’an, Chapter Two, Verse 274: "Those who (in charity) spend of their goods by night and by day, in secret and in public, have their reward with their Lord.”

Still, in various instances, informants expressly disapproved of “begging” (or “*tasūl*” in Arabic). I sometimes encountered beggars “lurking”—as if trying to be unobtrusive—around parking lots outside the imāmbārgāh on gathering nights. One night a friend and informant, Latif, and I met a man in the parking lot, who asked us for money. Latif responded by asking if he was Muslim, to which he replied that he was. Wincing a bit, Latif said to the man: “*ye ḥarāmi he - begging*” (it is forbidden), but suggested that instead he could go inside the *imāmbārgāh* and have a snack (*niyāz*) with the others gathered there. The man nodded and turned, walking further up the dusty parking lot, away from the *imāmbārgāh*. Reflecting James Scott’s (2008) analysis, social sanctions particular to the community dictate right and wrong ways by which the needy may solicit material or monetary aid from others.

Shia practice in the midst of aspirational striving and debt.

Even as Kadir and his group faced repeated rejections at successive deal negotiations, they maintained a sustained and sincere commitment to Shia and general Islamic practices, and debates over the life of the Imams and correct ritual practices were a frequent theme of conversation. They regularly organized small majlis gatherings every Thursday afternoon, during the months I spent with them. I

first met them, in fact, when Saad (a poet whose work I describe in the final chapter below) brought me to one such gathering to introduce me. When I described my interest in Urdu *nōḥē* and *marṣiya* (popular Shia poetic genres), Hamid immediately and passionately recited a *nōḥa* to me. Their gatherings typically included a Qur'an and *nōḥē* recitation, and group *du'ā* (or supplication) recitations. Toward the end of my time working with them, I noticed that outside guests joined in the weekly gatherings less frequently, and Saad and his friends also stopped coming at a certain point as well: a moment at which they realized the true scope of Kadir's manipulative business practices, they later explained to me.

All members of the group regularly attended group *namāz* (prayer) at the mosque near their home. As I mentioned above, Kadir was dissatisfied with the room they rented in the all-male, and mostly South Asian-occupied, "bachelor's" villa,[54] and specifically bemoaned its poor construction. A thin layer of drywall, for instance, separated their "living" room from a narrow, dimly-lit, and poorly-insulated hallway that ran outside the rooms, and that served as a de facto kitchen area, each room having its own stove, perched on a table in a line against one wall. The rooms shared a common dish-cleaning area in an exposed courtyard area. Despite their displeasure with the villa, they valued their close proximity to the mosque, sitting just outside their room's window, as the great benefit of the arrangement. They affirmed this to me on one early morning during my stay with them, when we all awoke to the very loud *aẕān* broadcast over loudspeakers just outside their open window.

[54] On the social significance of "bachelor" status in Dubai, as a racialized category, see Sarmadi (2013).

While they regularly attended group *namāz* in the mosque and organized small *majlis* gatherings in their room, I noted that they rarely attended weekly *majlis* gatherings at the imāmbārgāh. In particular, I noticed that Kadir especially would often only attend on occasions when a substantial *niyāz* was to be served: and even then, would arrive toward the end of the program. I met some others in the Shia community who tended to avoid public imāmbārgāh gatherings, specifically citing their disinterest in activities such as ritual weeping and listening to poetry. Nadim, for instance, criticized such activities as excessive and wasteful, as I described in Chapter 1. Kadir and his group were likely differently motivated: I believe their avoidance reflected some unease at socializing in the community, nervous about their business debts. The ritual of performing *namāz*, even in a large group setting such as the evening *maḡẖrib* is a highly personalized and internalized experience, compared to more "passive" rituals of sermon and poetry listening. From these interactions I found Kadir and his group to be sincere Muslims and Shias, and observed them sustain their commitment to key ritual practices even while becoming increasingly disengaged from the broader community, as the crisis around their business debts deepened.

Conclusion: Nested Urban Precarity

The unfolding time of debts—what Gustav Peebles (2010) describes as the forging of past-present and present-future linkages—makes informal and interpersonal systems of lending alternately productive and destructive as to social relations, compared with the immediacy of other impersonal transactions. Life for

many marginalized expatriates in Dubai unfolds in the precarious space delimited in time by iterative and interlinking transactions in borrowing and repayment—a precarity compounded by the transience of expatriate work in Dubai, and by the uncertain futures of visas. The Dubai government struggles to intercept absconding expatriate borrowers: those who abandon property and leave abruptly in order to escape undesirable employment contracts or outstanding debts.

In the context of such precarious lives, borrowing sets into motion aspirational thinking on wealth accumulation, drawing on the imagery and scale of development projects in Dubai. The trajectory of the Emirate's development itself has been plunged into uncertainty since the global recession's onset in 2008, and more specifically the housing market downturn in 2009—events that have heralded introspection by Dubai's developers and managers, criticism by journalists, and reflection by scholars (see Kanna 2013). Dubai's vulnerability to market forces, for instance, has led to images of Dubai as a mirage[55] or fantasy (Davis 2008). The ascent into fantasy and imagination—and the vertical space of towers—is conjoined to the descent into ground-level cycles of virtual wealth accumulation via credit exchange, sustaining expatriate life in Dubai while simultaneously straining social relationships, *even while* the center, the ideal, the goal, the endpoint, remains itself vague and uncertain. I consider this the precarity of aspiration.

In this chapter, qualities of built space are key to my analysis of an ethics of striving particular to work activities of Kadir's group: an ethics of activity that has ripple effects on the constitution of their social relationships and their religious

[55] Parker, Ian. 2005. "The Mirage: The Architectural Insanity of Dubai." *New Yorker*, October 17: pp 128–143.

practices. The built environment of Dubai in which they live, and labor directly on, creates for them an "aspirational" relationship with wealth accumulation and the pursuit of success. Their aspirational ethic in work and everyday life destabilizes their social relationships, disrupts their participation in communal religious activities, and imperils their ability to work and earn.

Nonetheless, this aspirational ethic, with its unstable energy, perpetuates life in Dubai for them *as* mundane life. Disappointment at the failure of a deal or the inability to meet a promised repayment deadline is offset by the perpetuation of other mundane work projects for instance, and of the recitation of poetry and Qur'an in their living space, which they continue to occupy. The failure to realize grandscale achievements, in other words, has not produced its opposite: abject failure or destitution. Rather, mundane life for them endures, as the outcome of an ethic of aspirational striving. As striving structures a way of mundane life, I note in this chapter how mundane life nurtures and perpetuates the work of striving.

4. Anxiety

Crime stories, empty space, projection, *pābandī, ẓulm*

This chapter explores a variety of anxieties about crime, as expressed by members of this community, and in light of a sense of security and public order in Dubai that many considered "false." In the final section of this chapter, I closely analyze a conversation about crimes—both related to Dubai and Pakistan—that I had with two Pakistani informants, Asgar and Sharif, in 2012. But that conversation was prefigured by other occasions in which Asgar expressed anxieties tied to specific locations and forms and figures in the late-night environment. I begin with one such description.

Asgar's shared room was a roughly ten-minute walk from the *imāmbārgāh* site. After months of late-night meetings around the *imāmbārgāh* with me and our other shared contacts in the community, he began to express his preference not to walk home alone. After I rented a car in my final months of fieldwork, he often asked me to drive him. The environment was familiar. Crossing over a major roundabout, on one such evening in September 2012, we entered the busy market square near his room, known for a variety of mechanics shops, and stores selling budget clothing and household goods. Mostly closed after 10pm, a Pakistani *ḍhābā* was open late with bright neon lights illuminating the street and sidewalk.

A left turn away from the square plunged us into a more dimly lit, potholed, and narrow network of streets and low-rise mostly-residential buildings. I pulled up on the roadside near his building and stopped. Sitting for a moment, he gestured toward a few men with their backs to us, wearing *salwār qamīẓ*—a typical dress of Indian and Pakistani men in public, though especially associated with Pakistani

Pathan men in Dubai. He then began to explain to me that this residential area used to be predominated by African Arabs—by which he meant black Africans from places like Sudan and Ethiopia, and added that the area had been rife with "crimes." I was initially confused by the reference, but he continued. "*Us time se, aōr ziāda beheter ho gaya. Phir bhī, ye Pakistani bradari mai, jo g̱unḍe log yaha rehte he, aōr rāt me ghūmte he*." ("From that time, things have gotten much better. Still, in this Pakistani community, the gangsters live here, and they go around at night.") As he described this, we watched as the shadowy figures receded further away down the road: figures populating a calm and mostly vacant street-scene. Then he added, in English, "you have to be careful," and clarified that the lingering criminal threat in his neighborhood discouraged him from walking around late at night.

I registered Asgar's anxiety initially as a vague unease. Later, in a more expansive conversation between Asgar, Sharif and myself, he rooted a similar set of anxieties more firmly in a variety of specific stories, or rumors, of purported crimes in Dubai. He and Sharif further tied those to a variety of other experiences and anxieties about crimes, violence, and first-hand experiences of victimhood in Pakistan. Also initially, and in my initial analysis, I noted the counterpoint between Asgar's expressed anxiety about criminality and the broader sense of public safety in Dubai. Many in the community communicated the latter sense to me, over the course of various conversations, and seemed to take that sense for granted. Still, central to my argument in this chapter is how the security environment, and sense of calm and public order in Dubai, create vacated spaces that foster fearful

imaginations of criminality—such as late-night environment that Asgar and I observed as we sat in my car—and into which migrants project a range of fears.

Critical theorist Sianne Ngai builds on a Freudian conception of "projection" as not a symptom or outcome of anxiety, but that which "constitutes" and "determines" anxiety. In her formulation, projection is the "means by which affect [of anxiety] assumes it particular form." Anxiety-as-projection is thus essentially spatial, relying on a configuration of both a "here" and a "'yonder' on which the experience of threat depends" (Ngai 2009, 211-212). Building on this, I examine below the role played by the ambience of immediate spaces to *prompt* projections and conform anxieties. I especially return to this question in my analysis of crime-storytelling among Asian migrants in Dubai, at the end of this chapter.

I thus focus on the role of controlled environments of inactivity to allow the foreign workers in Dubai I describe below—Rafiq, Asgar, and Sharif—critical space to formulate and project particular anxieties about criminality. The environments where Rafiq, Asgar, and Sharif told crime stories to me were notably those evacuated of work activity and criminal activity. On the one hand, I aim to show in this chapter how the evacuated quality of these spaces allow for a mode of "meandering" through an account, and of ruminating on a particular criminal event, that I take as a particular ethic of storytelling. This ethic of "reflection" allows the storyteller to conjure unseen events and project them into the immediate space of the telling.

Furthermore, the environment of concealment and evacuation of activity inspire other modes of storytelling that aim at grounding nebulous details, vague

sensations, fearful affects, and concealed actions in concrete details. The effort to ground nebulous ideas and distant events in concrete detail is another ethic of storytelling, I argue. The effort is part of a broader effort among foreign migrants to regain control over environments that they perceive to be structured by concealed forces. These forces include the acts of criminality themselves and the anti-crime surveillance apparatuses of the state. More generally, the ethic of "grounding detail" in storytelling is part of a migrant effort to occupy and "reclaim" evacuated public spaces.

Finally, I show below how the ethic of meandering and reflection in storytelling allows for migrants like Rafiq and Asgar to align the anxieties about criminal activity with anxieties related to employment and earning in Dubai. Their modes of storytelling occupy spaces and times created by the conditions of underemployment and unemployment. Reflection, as an ethic of storytelling, is a form of ethical activity that allows migrants to align various forms of anxiety in Dubai. I begin this chapter by exploring how secrecy and the cultivation of fear are central in the development of Dubai's security culture.

Dubai's security culture, public safety, and the construction on fear

Marxist commentator and historian Mike Davis has described how Arabian Gulf emirates profit from an international fear economy. Resources and personnel mobilized for the American military efforts in the Middle East and Afghanistan, transiting through Gulf-based hubs, feed America's (and Europe's) fear-based wars. The Gulf is a springboard for U.S. army operations: all six GCC member states host

U.S. bases, with roughly 40,000 troupes stationed between them. Davis cites not only the money transit passengers spend, but also the free-trade zones that act a neoliberal utopias, allowing for high volume goods-trading encumbered by neither taxes nor union organization, and typically utilizing Western capital and currencies (Davis 2006, 58, 63).

Additionally, fears of impending global oil scarcity, and of disruptions due to Middle East political instability, also generate economic gain for the relatively secure Emirate, as futures market traders react and oil prices rise. Though oil and gas production only accounts for 2% of Dubai's GDP, oil-rich neighbors Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia invest heavily in Dubai construction and other development projects. Specific political events increase the speculated future price of oil, prompting producers to withhold supply in anticipation of higher future prices. The actual price then rises due to decreased supply.

Dubai profits in a third way from an economy of global fear. Building on an argument begun by political scientist Noora Lori, I explore how Dubai harnesses the deliberate "vagueness" in the construction of "threat" globally, in the context of the War on Terror, in order to defend and perpetuate *kafāla*: the Gulf regional system where the native population is charged with regulating the foreign labor population. Political theorists note how vague threats create conditions of relentless and pervasive fear in a population, and drive a politics focused on security (McManus 2011). In the context of the United States, for instance, Brian Massumi has described the terror alert system enacted after 9/11 as an example of a blunt apparatus tooled to respond to and reflect vague, formless security threats. The alert system, in

Massumi's analysis, was designed to harness the vagueness of indeterminate threats, and use that uncertainty as a tool to cultivate and "modulate" the collective fear of the populace (Massumi 2005, 32). Furthermore, in a context where state security agencies presume pervasive and relentless threats, distinctions between internal and external threats become less important. As John and Jean Comaroff remark, reflecting on policing in postcolonial South Africa "Received distinctions between crime and terror, always inchoate, are being revised," in the post-War on Terror era (Comaroff and Comaroff 2008, 275).

To examine how policing in Dubai relies on and produces necessarily vague visions of (foreign) threats, Noora Lori examines a variety of official studies conducted by the Dubai police. She argues that the studies work to associate the existence of crime with the large presence of foreigners, who made up 88% of the U.A.E. population in 2011. Lori argues that the studies a) conflate the threat posed by the large majority foreign population as both cultural and criminal, and b) correlate predicted increases in crime with general demographic trends, rather than with specific crime data trends or instances of crimes by foreigners. Such crime data is, as a policy, withheld from the public. Only the highest profile cases are reported on the Dubai Police website.[56]

Spectral figures of "cultural"-others in Dubai, who might also be criminal, emerge from these generalized descriptions of threats to the nation's "social security:" to the security of the Emirati family, in particular. The Asian female housekeeper is one such archetypal figure, who threatens to lure juvenile Emirati

[56] OSAC, United States Department of State, "United Arab Emirates 2014 Crime and Safety Report," 2014: https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=15084.

males into "early sexual experiences," according to one Police study. Crimes associated with the Asian migrant male, another generalized archetype, are themselves male-gendered: "robbery, drug traffic and addiction … raping, child abuse," according to another Police study (Lori 2011, 322-323). This correlation between the Asian migrant community and the incidence of specific types of crimes, despite the lack of actual crime data, is echoed in the U.S. State Department's annual report on crime and safety in the U.A.E. The DOS clarifies that, in absence of publicly available crime data, their claims are based on "open source reporting, U.S. Embassy Abu Dhabi's Regional Security Office (RSO) reports, information provided by other embassy officials, and private citizens." The report claims that

> Reported crimes, to include homicides, tend to be within the expatriate population, which is predominately Asian and South Asian. The expatriate workforce consists predominantly of single men. The majority of crimes attributed to this group consist of petty theft, public offenses such as fighting or public intoxication, sexual harassment, and rare incidents of violent assault.[57]

Constructing the cultural-criminal threat to the nation's "social security" in generalized terms and tropes, in the manner of the police reports for instance, is efficacious for the state. It helps lend popular Emirati support to the *kafāla* temporary sponsorship model for managing foreign labor, for instance, despite growing international criticisms. By managing a cultural and criminal threat, that is, the government also manages an economic one. Maintaining the transience and impermanence of the migrant labor class is partly a tool to preserve the prosperity

[57] OSAC, United States Department of State, "United Arab Emirates 2014 Crime and Safety Report," and "United Arab Emirates 2013 Crime and Safety Report." https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=15084 and https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=13886.

of the native population, a component of a domestic policy aimed at reserving private sector employment for citizens. Capacities such as swift forced deportations also forestall the political organization of workers for more rights and better conditions. Thus, Dubai participates in a global trend among nations toward managing nebulous threats to security—what I consider a global fear economy—as part of its economic development agenda.

The suppression of crime data helps the Dubai government to effectively associate the criminal threat with a broad group. Of course, the link between police secrecy and the criminalization of groups is familiar in anthropological studies of policing. Didier Fassin, for instance, links his own difficulty gaining research access to observe an anticrime squad in the Paris suburbs with the techniques of deliberate obfuscation in police interrogations. In this example, the secrecy strategy not only allows the police to control an interrogation encounter but to ascribe guilt onto a person who only vaguely matches a description. It is a strategy consistent, in other words, with the proxy criminalization of groups via the actions of individuals (Fassin 2013, 2-5, 14).

The construction of vague cultural-criminal threats to the nation drives speculation and fear among the native and Western expat populations about what the Asian expat labor force *might be doing*, or *might do*. Conversely, I suppose, the suppression of information by the state drives forms of speculation and fear among the South Asian population about what *the state* might be doing, and about criminal activity in general. The anxieties that Asgar and Sharif expressed also inflect the model of racial tension and fear of the foreign constructed by the state's security

ideology. Consider, for instance, the entirely absent figure of the African Arab deviant male from the present-day neighborhood in which Asgar lives, but which nonetheless "haunts" the environment through the sense of lingering criminal activity. The set of crime stories and rumors that I explore in the last sections of this chapter also invoke highly specific cultural others belonging to the foreign community in Dubai.

The tension of Dubai as safe by outward appearance yet unsafe by an inward and concealed reality is registered in both the U.S. State Department's warnings to Western travelers to Dubai and in the testimonies of members of the Pakistani expatriate community living there. In our informal conversation, which I chronicle at the end of this chapter, Sharif seemed to capture the central enigma, declaring that "Dubai is safe, and yet we can't say it is safe." While I explore this broader fieldwork conversation in depth below, I flag his statement here in comparison to the language of the State Department travel warning:

> While the reported crime rate is low, actual crime rates may be higher due to under-reporting. The host nation is sensitive to maintaining a very safe and secure public image which may discourage individuals from reporting crime. U.S. nationals should not be lulled into a false sense of security though due to a lower crime rate.[58]

On the one hand, I cite this to show how the logic of formless threats salient to the United States becomes imposed onto assessments of internal security elsewhere, and then adopted and implemented by states like the U.A.E.

[58] OSAC, United States Department of State, "United Arab Emirates 2014 Crime and Safety Report," 2014: https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=15084 and https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=15071.

But more specifically, I link the sense here that crime rates *might* be high—despite reported rates and the Emirates' cultivated sense of public order—with my informant's concern about a nebulous concealed life of criminality. In an environment where the "potential" for a false sense of security is high, I argue that speculations of concealed crimes become fantastic through tellings that circulate as crime-story "rumors." The circulation of rumors relies on two forms of absence: a) absence of information, and b) public spaces relatively evacuated of activity, including criminal activity—including the late-night street-scape around Asgar's home. Both types of absence are outcomes of strong state regulatory control mechanisms.

In a context where the government attempts to a) suppress actual crime data and details of specific crimes, and b) attribute criminal or cultural-corruption potential to the wide proportion of mostly-Asian foreign workers in the Emirate, I consider in this chapter how members of the foreign labor community manage their own insecurities. How does an environment of suspicion in Dubai affect foreigners' (counter)strategies to manage their own wide-ranging fears and anxieties? I analyze a variety of such narrative tellings, and aim to understand how some members of the broad Asian community working in Dubai react to the tension between the appearance of outward safety and the concealed life of criminality, itself a consequence of the state's policy of not reporting crime statistics yet establishing a vague correlation between demographic trends and resultant cultural threats and crime rates. I attempt to trace how members *sense* safety in Dubai: as either "true" or "false," and as a consequence in part of police attitudes of suspicion toward them.

In other contexts and instances where states have restricted public access to critical information about political events and markets, anthropologists have noted the public's turn to fantastical assessments of concealed realities, assessments that circulate and magnify via rumors. Veena Das notes how, in the twenty-four hours following Indira Gandhi's death, speculation among the general populace was rife that she had been killed by her Sikh bodyguards. In the following days rumors circulated of violent crimes being committed by celebratory Sikhs against the sympathetic and unsuspecting Hindus who had harbored them (Das 2007, 126). John and Jean Comaroff also note how jobless men in rural South Africa blamed their unemployment on the work of witchcraft: that is, on the actions of certain elderly women (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 287). In both contexts in South Africa and Delhi, the circulation of rumors and the fantastical assumptions of concealed events (Sikh raping Hindu girls and elderly women cursing young men) are particular reactions to not merely the state's suppression of information, but the absence of the state regulation.

Das' argument at this juncture is particular. Words in panic rumors, in her analysis, gain perlocutionary force: they cause or instigate action (Das 2007, 121). For the Comaroffs, narratives about the actions of witches work to "translate translocal discourses"—such as the work of global capitalism to wide demographic wealth gaps—"in to local cause and effects" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 286). Might we take this as also an example of the perlocutionary force of language? Hearing these rumors, Hindus authorize themselves to kill Sikhs, while jobless South African men authorize themselves to kill witches.

In these contexts, the circulation of rumors and enactment of violence fills a void created by a relative absence and weakness of state regulatory forces. By comparison, in Dubai, I argue that rumors flourish in the absence of public information and in the public calm created by a highly-controlled public sphere. In this space devoid of concrete information on criminal activity, yet filled with a sense of nebulous threat and the uncertainties associated with transient employment statuses, the range of the "possible" becomes wide. "Anything can happen here," one of my Karachi-emigrant informants commented, in the context of discussing purported crimes. Ultimately, I will show below how these tellings are often grounded in precise details. I take this as a strategy of rooting events in a verifiable reality: on that reworks forms of transience, uncertainty, and violence that characterize life in both Pakistan and Dubai.

Latif and the tempo of downtime speculation

Downtimes in Dubai for the Shia community are cyclical over time: not only periodic to the day or week, but also to the year. In May, I once caught a particularly busy and hard-to-reach informant—Sajdali—at the central Dubai mosque I frequented, around the midday prayer. This was, in other words, a typically lightly attended and relaxed prayer time at the mosque in the five-a-day cycle. He was busy as usual (though he had taken time to come to mosque for the prayer) and we conversed briefly. When I asked if I could come by to talk to him about his family history and community history records from their former life in Tanzania, he demurred, suggesting the he was getting busier now, and implied he had family

coming to visit soon. “Maybe after Ramadan” he said. The maybe-after-Ramadan timeframe struck me as very long: Ramadan itself was still over 2 months away. Given that the extended Muharram mourning and gathering phase itself lasted several months—extending into the following months of Safar and Rabi—meant that approximately half the year was set aside as relatively “busy,” i.e. filled with religious events and social obligations.

These “busy” periods are also characterized by restrictions. On a weekly basis, my work accelerated around Thursday (especially at night) and Friday, the time of my informants’ workweek downtime and also of increased religious activity. I spent a portion of these times during Muharram and Safar, early in my fieldwork, driving with one Pashto-speaking informant Latif—a man slightly older than me who had established his own small “technical services” business. He thus maintained a small car to convey himself and his supplies. In idle times on these days/nights, our conversation sometimes turned toward music, such as Pashto folk songs, and the question of listening to Latif’s car radio for instance. On those occasions, as well as those when I tried to show him some Pashto songs I was familiar with, he suggested we’d better wait a few months to listen to such things, until after the mourning period ended.

Latif was a member of a Pashtun tribe with both Shia and Sunni factions, part of the broader Karlanri group of tribes native especially to eastern Afghanistan and Waziristan in Pakistan.[59] Pathans self-identify through their descent from a common ancestor, Qais. In Pathan genealogies, Qais is a descendant of Afghana, who was a

[59] For a general description of various Pashtun tribes in the Pakistan’s border states—especially FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—see Johnson and Mason (2008).

grandson of King Saul, the first King of Israel who is mentioned in the Old Testament of the Bible (Caroe 1958, 5; Ahmed 2013, 129). Pathan genealogies further convey that Qais, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, had three sons and adopted a fourth, Karlanri. The four sons designate four Tribal "families" by which Pathans are still organized today (Caroe 1958, 8-22).

Historiographies and contemporary accounts often designate tribes in the Karlanri group as the "hill tribes," and describe them as "wild mountaineers" famed for "deeds of daring" (Caroe 1958, 20, 22), and are called "the most warlike" and "the most conservative and irascible" among Pathan tribes (Johnson and Mason 2008, 50). The historical association of Pathans with the mountain regions of Peshawar and led to the development of an alternate name "Rohilla" to describe them beginning in the eighteenth century colonial India—derived from the Punjabi word *rōh* meaning mountain (Caroe 1958, 439). In his history of Pashtun migration, especially in the Indian Ocean region, Robert Nichols begins with the migration of "Rohillas" in the late eighteenth century from "west of the Indus to settle northeast of New Delhi in the Rohilkhand region:" part of a "centuries-old pattern of migration" inside the Indian subcontinent for employment as "soldier entrepreneurs" in the North Indian market. Nichols sees continuity between these patterns of out-migration and the contemporary trends of Pashtun workers migrating to the Arabian Gulf city-states such as Dubai, patterns driven by aridity and underdevelopment of regions of western Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan (Nichols 2008, 3-4).

Like many Shia Pathans I met over nearly two years of research in U.A.E., Latif's home was in Parachinar, Pakistan. The city is home to a majority Pashtun Shia population and has been a frequent flashpoint in sectarian Shia-Sunni conflict since the 1980s. It is today "a potent symbol of Shia suffering" among Pakistani Shias and in Iran (Vatanka 2012, 5; see also Lodhi 1988, 813). His wife lived with his extended family in Parachinar. Their failure (as of the time of my research) to have children was a source of much anxiety of Latif, as he confided to me frequently.

My relationship with Latif began just before Ramadan. I expressed my (most straightforward) interest of finding Pashto-language majlises in Dubai, and to discuss differences between the Dubai and Pakistani majlises. He needed some help promoting his technical services business, and I agreed to circulate a few of his cards to my (rather nascent) professional network in Dubai, and especially to my interior design contractor contacts, with whom I introduced him and suggested a collaboration. I spent *ʻĀshūrā* night with him in his shared room (the height of the religiously-intensive season), and rode with him the next day for the *ʻĀshūrā*-day *majlis*.

Yet in the weeks after that, as the mourning period waned a bit in intensity, our relationship relaxed a bit. Most Friday afternoons in January and February 2012, I would take the Metro train to its last stop, at where he would pick me and up and drive me the rest of the way to his apartment in International City. As his other roommates were all taxi drivers[60] many of my visits involved long afternoon hours

[60] Taxi work requires 12 hour shifts 7 days a week. The drivers operate in relation to monthly earning targets, according to the Western calendar months. They may exceed their targets, though

siting, watching Urdu-language news and soap operas, and Hindi films, on his television, and meeting his other roommates, around their 4-5 PM shift change. In these moments of "downtime," and of waning religious restrictions, our conversations shifted a bit.

Latif was both a leader and an introvert. When I met him he conducted his "technical services" business alone. Four months later he had successfully recruited two young Pathan men to come and join his company as assistants. One described him as a "genius" for his business acumen. A few months later, when he ran into financial difficulty, another member of the room (on which Latif was the leaseholder) described his business management as foolish. After two months of close interaction—mostly weekly meetings on Thursday evenings and Friday afternoons (during his day-off)—it became clear to me that his biggest concern was, as he described it, his wife's inability to conceive children. He had taken his wife to see a doctor, though this had not yielded results. He considered taking a second wife to solve the problem, though he also said he dared not, lest he infuriate his first wife. "But what to do?" he would ask.

His distress over his own advancing age and lack of children seemed to manifest in a melancholy and gentle affect. His high-pitched voice, for which some in his apartment teased him, added to this affect. These personal characteristics, as well as our mutual perception of Dubai as safe, made our discussion about weaponry one day seem out-of-place. As we were driving into International City from Dubai a few months after Muharram, we discussed security in Dubai relative to

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they are penalized for underachieving them. Once achieved (often in the final days of the month) many take a few days off.

that in U.S. cities and in Pakistan. We agreed that Dubai was safer than the U.S. or Pakistan. Latif qualified the latter by describing his own arsenal of weapons that he kept at his house in Parachinar. “All houses keep weapons,” he said. As he spoke, his body seemed to shift and face animate. With some amusement and excitement, he described several Russian made “Kalashnikov” riffles, and even grenades that he kept. I asked him if he had used his weapons before. He said he had, and gave a high-pitched laugh: amusement that again was aimed partly at my surprise, or what he suspected perhaps that I would find surprising, especially given our easy friendship and the outward sense of security in Dubai.

Disempowered in Dubai as an immigrant laborer, displaced from social conventions of Pashtun society, and worn by regular worry about his marital and family problems, his bodily affect transformed in his car as he described his weapons—as we drove through the massive residential development project in which he lived in Dubai, passing by where a poorly-contained sewage pool sometimes wafted bad odors into the residences facing it. Despite pervasive infrastructural problems, this residential area was a zone of restraint and orderly conduct, subject to the same felt surveillance presence Dubai police use as security and enforcement tools.

I interpret this episode between us in the car—a mere moment among many other hours of driving around Dubai, sometimes aimlessly—as not merely a window onto another life, but an out-of-place entry of a memory or condition of an elsewhere life. I see him performing an affect tied to an experience of violence. I am less interested to highlight the tension between this expression of violence

elsewhere and a) the relaxed cadence of "downtime" life in Dubai and b) the highly regulated environment. Rather, I suggest, following Ngai's formulation on the spatialization of anxiety, that the immediate controlled environment serves to *allow* these kinds of expressions.

The idea also builds on recent ethnographic work on mundane life in the aftermath of violence. In Colombia, for instance, Juan Orrantia has tracked a variety of "tales and short vignettes" told by men in a town where paramilitary forces had massacred citizens in 2000. He finds the stories "brewed in the heat and stillness" of the environment in which they are told, and "folded in the crevices of boredom that are part of the simplicity of the everyday" (Orrantia 2009, 242; see also Orrantia 2012).

Orrantia's perspective builds on conceptions of crisis embedded in ordinary life (Berlant 2011, 11). More specifically, it reflects how the ordinary unfolds in and around "banal," "solid," or "dead," built environments, but is also filled with affective forces that spread outward into "too many possible scenes" (Stewart 2007, 127-128). Kathleen Stewart powerfully conveys the connection between ordinary life and the "still life" of a painting or arrested scene, the type of life experience that can easily "turn the self into a dreaming scene." It can also be an "alibi for all of the violence, inequality and social insanity folded into the open disguise of ordinary things" (19). She notes, for instance, how easily "a look," a facial expression, can create affective ripples and sprout "little seeds of anxiety" (29).

At this juncture, then, rather than interrogate the relationship between rumor and action, I seek to consider the relationship between anxiety and inaction.

Specifically, I argue that the environment of public order and the tempo of off-season downtime, for a working foreigner like Latif in Dubai, foster anxieties and allows one to project aspects of violence and trauma of other places into the present, and immediate environment. In the central examples in the remainder of this paper, these projections are channeled through stories, narratives, and rumors related to criminal violence.

Rafiq, sectarian trauma, vivid details of memory

In February, as the mourning period waned into greater downtime and less social activity, Latif secured and paid for his uncle's visit visa. This would be, he told me, both a "vacation" of sorts for his uncle and an opportunity for him to search for work.[61] I discovered later that his uncle—who I'll call Rafiq—had worked in Dubai for 5 years in the late 2000s, as a light truck driver and fork-lift operator, before returning again to Pakistan. He had hoped to rejoin his former company; upon arriving he reconnected with old friends and integrated himself back into the company's accommodation—alternately staying there and at Latif's apartment. He told me he applied for a job there, but toward the end of his visit had still not connected with his old manager, he admitted.

Rafiq was also in need of some diversion and recovery, Latif explained to me. He described how that a year earlier Rafiq had been kidnapped by the Taliban on the road from Parachinar to Peshawar. Given my ambition to understand how

[61] I encountered many people had taken 30-day visas to do the same, or had secured them for others. While nationals of Western countries received visit visas for free upon arrival, Pakistani had to pay about $110 USD, as of 2012.

Pakistani laborers manage difficult situations in Dubai relative to Pakistan, Latif offered that I could talk to him. Ultimately, this resulted in a one-on-one interview with Rafiq, that Latif also attended and which I audio-recorded on my phone. For offering his story to help my research, I then tried to help Rafiq with his job search, pursuing open positions for truck drivers on online job boards. Unfortunately, by the end of 40 days (30 day visa plus a 10-day grace period) he had not found a job, and returned home. However, as we reached the final 2 weeks of his stay, it seemed to me that neither he nor Latif were as intent on finding him a job as I was. Perhaps his return was a foregone conclusion, or perhaps his trip was primarily personal, where neither sponsor (Latif) nor visitor was intent on finding a job. The sense, in this case, that Latif was emotional or did not use his money well contributed to the perception that he did not have good business sense.

As with Latif, I met Rafiq at *niyāz* at the Khoja *imāmbārgāh* in Dubai; Latif brought him and introduced him to me. He was happy to meet me; the three of us chatted and ate together, then agreed to meet the following day, a Friday. Latif had a small gathering to greet his uncle. I met him in the apartment the next day. While Latif prepared some food with his employees, and the other members of the apartment prepared for their taxi shifts, Rafiq and I sat and talked quietly: mostly small talk about Parachinar. He was more subdued than the previous night, and much quieter than the others. At 59, he was on the cusp of being unemployable. Above 60, and almost no one will give you a job.[62]

[62] The law disallows new employment visas or renewal to anyone over 65. In practice, renewals continue through 65, whereas new visas are not extended to those over 60, my informants explained.

Rafiq agreed to an interview, which we arranged for the following weekend. Latif described him as kind and gentle, partly why he and his family were so worried about him during the abduction and after he returned home. He spoke in our interview in a formal and deliberate Urdu, partly for my benefit and partly because it was his second language. He repeated things often, sometimes saying things two different ways so that I could understand, and for emphasis. At the end of his initial narrative description, for instance, he said: "*giāra ādmī kō mārā … mār ḍālā,* death *kiā, k̲h̲atm kiā*:" four different ways of saying that the kidnappers killed 11 people. He also described in two ways how, if one of the prisoners broke the rules (*k̲h̲ilāf varzī kiā*)[63], he would be hit: *us kō remand dēgā*, *mārēgā*. Near the end of our interview, Rafiq further described in two ways how throughout the ordeal he feared that he too would be killed: *maiṅ sōchrahāthā ki hum lōgōn kō mārēgā, zabar karēgā*.

Authenticity and precise details

The interview occurred on a Tuesday night in Latif's apartment, when all other members were out on shifts or sleeping in the bedroom. Rafiq was calm and mechanical as he spoke, at first narrating the story to me (and for my recording) as a chronological synopsis, in the form of a 5-minute monologue. He described: *I had been on a bus travelling between Parachinar to Peshawar. The bus was stopped and boarded by armed gunmen at Bagan village.*[64] *The passengers were removed from the bus, and then searched and robbed. Three were killed on site. The rest of us were then loaded into the back of pick-up truck "one on top of the other"* (ek dūsrē kē ūper) *and*

[63] Qureshi, Bashir Ahmad. 2005. "K̲h̲ilaf." In
[64] A village on the Parachinar-Peshawar road, roughly ten miles from the border with Afghanistan.

driven into the nearby hills. We were packed into a room and given some food and some unclean drinking water, and then chained up. We slept like that for the first night. Then the next day we were divided into unevenly sized groups, and the groups were then sent scattered to different locations. I was one among a group of three. We were forced to work during the day, doing menial chores such as cleaning, and were chained up (hathkaṛī) *at night. This routine continued for 3 months. Then the Pakistani government paid out 3 crore rupees to the kidnappers. After this, they released 22 prisoners, and killed the remaining 11.*

Hearing this last detail I was surprised, and asked why they had killed 11 more at the very end, after having received their ransom money. At this point, Latif spoke up, starting to say *"zabar karnā*" (i.e. forceful or violent oppression), by way of explanation, and Rafiq interjected "*ẓulm*" (meaning tyranny or cruelty). He concluded with: *then the 22 who survived, including myself, returned home, but with difficulty: we had been bound each night for long periods, and thus our hands were injured*.

His account, as he gave it in this first telling, was chronological and concise. He spoke calmly and quietly; the ends of his sentences occasionally tapered into a near-whisper: times in which he often repeated things to me, to make his point clear. He seemed to include little reference to his feelings (except for his expression of the attackers being "tyrannical.") On the one hand, I believe that he concerned himself, in telling the story, with being authentic—perhaps for my benefit. Specifically, I believe he strove to ground the narrative with numerical details as a way to lend it authentic detail. Here is a synopsis of the same story as constructed

through the numerical details he deploys (with the time elapsed at each mention, from the beginning of the telling):

Table 4.1

Time elapsed	Detail described
0:00	March 25 (the date of the abduction)
0:05	There were 3 cars
0:16	They killed 3 guys immediately
0:52	"it wasn't a pick-up … it was a 4x4 pick-up"
0:56	they put 11 of us in 1 pick-up
1:58	all 11 of us ate just a little biryani, then we left it alone
3:02	we spent 1 night at the first center
3:07	then the next day we were split into groups. 3 in the first group, 6 in the second, 8 in the third, etc.
4:31	One guy among us was beaten very severely. On 3 occasions he was beaten because he had tried to escape.
4:50	We were held for 3 months
4:53	After that, they [Pakistan government] gave 3 crore rupees [for our release]
4:59	After that, they let 22 guys go, but also killed 11 guys[65]

I note that he did not approximate any numerical valuation he gave (as is typical in everyday Urdu speech), but rather gave precise numbers. I argue that coalescing around precise details, in the telling of a traumatic event like this, has the

[65] Later in the interview, he clarified that eight men were killed in the end. Since three were killed initially on the road at the time of the abduction, the total lives lost through the ordeal was eleven, according to his telling.

effect of suppressing an emotional response, both for the actor in the event and for the recollector. Does it reflect an attention to numerical detail as a strategy for organizing oneself in a traumatic context? Did Rafiq actively try to count and account for his co-prisoners as a way to manage a difficult situation? Or do numerical details survive more vividly in memory? Or does a numerical *telling* allow for the suppression of more-expressive painful memories from felt experience? Or do numbers lend credibility to an account that may otherwise seem fantastic, extraordinary, or defy belief?

I'm not prepared to discount the possibility of any of these mechanisms or strategies. But I believe that "fixed" or precise or vivid details (such as numerical accountings, or details of place) well up in a telling as a way of grounding speech. Again here, we might turn to Veena Das's work on rumor, where the critical challenge is one of trusting words in rumor, evacuated of signature. She identifies local details that enter into rumors, through which words gain perlocutionary force to effect local violence. For example, those rumors by Hindus, about Sikhs killing the Hindus who harbored them, were tied to particular named locales and districts. Das also describes how rumors "anchor to the images of self and other that [circulated] in the discourses of militancy" (Das 2007, 117). Valentine Daniel also describes how narratives of violence build from—but also depart from to varying degrees—the "master narratives" of events in the Sri Lankan civil war (Daniel 1996, 132-133).

I take these patterns described by both Das and Daniel as strategies of grounding a narrative in verifiable detail. More generally, I suggest that grounding memories and tellings are imperative strategies of recollection in places like Dubai:

that is, strategies to overcome the force of strong state control and widespread unease among the vast Asian migrant community. In a context where verifiable crime information is suppressed by the state, and many crime events are hidden from the media, detail, veracity, and believability become key benchmarks in crime stories.

Generalized tropes as relational credibility

Beyond recounting precise and numerical details, Rafiq strives to lend his experience and narrative what I consider "relational credibility." While precise place and numerical details aim to root a telling in a concrete and verifiable reality, contextual plausibility aims to establish the fantastic milieu into which specific events are related (not grounded). After Rafiq's 5-minute monologue summary of the ordeal, we continued for an additional 10 minutes of a looser back-and-forth conversation. He listened to my occasional questions, but answered tangentially at times, and again gave scant details of his personal experience. Rather he seemed to offer a combination of numerical details and contextual references, through his explanations of generalized events.

One exchange seven minutes into the interview is instructive. After his story of the ordeal, I wondered how well he'd recovered. Looking at him as we talked, I tried to discern signs of any lasting bodily injury. He appeared to be healthy, I thought. I was a bit overwhelmed after listening to his detailed account of his terrifying ordeal, and bumbled a question, to which he quickly answered, then changed the subject a bit.

> Brian: "These days life goes on for you, and goes well I suppose?" [*Ājkāl āpki zindagī phir bhī cheltīhē, aōr ṭhīk cheltīhē, na?*].
> Rafiq: "9 of the 11 has lost weight … had become weak." [*giāra kī nō wazan kam hō gayā … kamzōr hō gayā*].
> Rafiq: "In their group, there were Pathans, Punjabis, Arabs, Chechens, all people. They were Taliban. They were terrorists." [*Us mēṅ Pathan thā, Punjabi thā, Arabic thā, aōr Chechni-wālā thā, pōrā lōg thā. Ye Taliban thā. Daheshatgard thā.*]

After explaining this, he related a story of a suicide bombing of the American Consulate in Peshawar, perpetrated by a "Turk." About a year later, after reanalyzing the recording, my Internet search found references to a high profile 2010 suicide bombing event at the Consulate—likely his reference point, I decided. I found no evidence suggesting the Turkish origin of the perpetrators, however. Details about the foreign origins of terrorists add to the sense that the violent tyrannical forces at work in rugged countryside of FATA in Pakistan are also strange and fantastic.

Through this example and others, Rafiq wanted me to understand the audacity of this group's actions. He told another story at the end:

> *Taliban lōg bōltā thā: ēk ādmī thā, ēk is kē sāt 'aurat thā, ye khēt mēṅ kām kartā thā. Vo bōltā thā "āp 'aurat kē ūper kyūṅ kām karte heṅ?" Us kō pukarne, phir us kō kōṛā diā. Mārā. Ādmī kō bhī mārā, 'aurat kō bhī mārā. Dōnōṅ kō mārā. Kōṛā diā. Bōltā, "kyūṅ kām kartē hēṅ, is kē ūper, khēt mēṅ?" "Bāhar kyūṅ nikālā is kō?" Itnā ẓulm kartē hēṅ.*
>
> [The Taliban people said: there was a man, and with him one woman, they worked farmland. They [the Taliban] said, "Why are you making this woman work?" They captured them, then they flogged them. Dead. They killed the man, they also killed the woman. Killed them both. Flogged them. They said, "why do you make her work in the field? Why did you take her outside?" They are this tyrannical / cruel.]

From his telling, it's unclear whether his captors had told him this story during his ordeal, or whether he had heard the story second hand from others outside the

Taliban. Nevertheless, telling parallel stories in this way helps to establish the veracity of his own experience. Again the challenge is one of lending credibility to an oral account in absence of verifiable (visual or recorded) data, especially given the skepticism and speculation that surrounds the life of crime in Dubai. But I also note this as a strategy of minority "voicing," given the relative invisibility of Shia suffering in Pakistan, in the opinions of many of my informants, and considered in other scholarship (see for instance Nasr 2007).

Familiar fears

While describing first-hand victimhood experiences and criminal activity in Pakistan, I explore in the next section how migrants relate and intermix accounts of criminal activity in Dubai. The contrasts and similarities that Asgar and Sharif draw between forms of criminal activity in both places, both explicit and implicit in their narratives, fit into a broader set of concerns raised over the geo-political connections between Pakistan and the Gulf region. These concerns arose, in particular, over a series of discussion I had with another group of working Pakistanis in Dubai. Exploring this other set of research interactions helps me consider how life in Pakistan and Dubai might be structured by similar anxieties motivated by common oppressive forces.

To frame the question differently, I note how Rafiq related aspects of his kidnapping ordeal with terms such *hathkaṛī* and *ẓulm*. Other related terms, such as *pābandī* and *majbūrī*, were used more explicitly to describe experiences of either a) economic precarity or b) being part of a religious minority, in Dubai. I represent

how I found these words contextually embedded in my fieldwork, and note their etymologies, in the chart below (see Table 4.2). Still, I ask how the experiences these terms describe might be aligned for Pakistani workers in Dubai, for whom life in both places is structured by forms of struggle and oppression.

Near the end of my fieldwork tenure, I joined with a small group of Pakistani Shia over several evenings at their company accommodation in Dubai. Their employer was a major ports operator and developer. Their sprawling camp was crowded, segregated by nationality, and sparse—the small room in which we met was shared by six Pakistani workers. Yet unlike many other company camps in the Emirates, this place was centrally located, allowing resident workers far greater autonomy to come and go. (Many other large companies—such as in the construction sector—house their workers a remote desert-situated camps, then bus them to worksites daily.)

My meetings with this core group of eight men resembled at times a symposium on Pakistani politics, especially in relation to world politics. My primary contact and guide to the camp, Imran (who I introduced in the Introduction and Chapter 1) worked as an environmental impact officer with the company, had a family background in law, and was a leader among this small group of men. Our discussions, in part, compelled them to work out their commitments to Pakistan's future development as an extension of their own participation in the global extractive labor economy that routes them through Dubai. At times, in other words, they compared both development trajectories and their own life experiences between Dubai and Pakistan.

Table 4.2

	hathkaṛī	*ẓulm*	*pābandī*	*majbūrī*
Etymology	From Hindi, meaning "handcuffs," from *hath* (hand) and *kaṛi* (link)	From Arabic, meaning "tyranny"	From Persian, meaning "restriction" or "boundedness" From *pa-band* meaning "foot-tie" or feet shackles in Urdu and Persian	From Arabic, meaning "compulsion" or "constraint." *majbar* in Arabic means forced or compelled
Contexts	Being kidnapped by Taliban. As marking the body, as including an aftereffect of kidnapping experience	Way to characterize Taliban actions and motivations.	Used primarily to describe the restrictions against Shias to gather and perform mourning rituals in public. In America there is no *pābandī*. In some parts of Pakistan there is *pābandī*, for instance due to the Taliban. In Dubai, people cannot gather, due to *pābandī*.	1) Used to express difficulty of finding work in Dubai, but also the strenuousness of such work. The compulsion to send money home. 2) Also used to characterize the security apparatus. Used to describe the driving restrictions, such as driving "within the lines" on the road.
Characters who use	Rafiq	Rafiq and Latif	Variety of young men in the community	1) Pathan employed in maintenance job by Mosque committee 2) Pathans, upon driving with me on outer Dubai highways

One group conversation in early September explored the problem of American military intervention around the world. Some argued, for instance, that American military activities had "created," enabled, and emboldened Bin Laden to conduct his own militarized campaign. One participant generalized this phenomenon, describing how "wherever Americans live in the world, trouble and instability takes root" (*jidr bhī rehēgā, us kō tension rehtē / amrīkan 'awām ne k̲h̲aṭre mēṅ dāl diā*). To further illustrate his point, he explained that prior to the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan (*ḥamlē karnē sē pehelē*), Americans could travel around Pakistan and around the world with great ease. He cited the increased presence of motorcycles on roads in both Dubai and Pakistan as an example of how the public sphere was reshaped in the post-U.S. invasion period:

> "Americans shift to Dubai, now you see so many scooters everywhere … In Pakistan, at popular rural heritage sites, Americans used to get around freely by public transport carriages (*ṭāngē sē*), there were hardly any scooters, etc. Not anymore."

I interpret this as his suggestion that anxious Americans avoid public crowds, and thus favor the use of private vehicles such as motorcycles. I take it as a remarkable attempt to see a transformation of public space in Pakistan and Dubai as a consequence of heightened fear, itself a consequence of American military actions, in his view. It suggests the similar "shape" of public anxieties in both places.

Later that month I had an extended conversation with Imran about the contemporary condition in Pakistan, especially for Shia people. He clarified his belief that "80%" of Pakistan's problems were due to "American interests" in Pakistan, and that these interests have led to the overall "ruin" of Pakistan's "environment" (*Pakistan pūrā environment barbād kar diā*). Yet he elaborated a bit further,

presenting another overarching "environmental" factor imbricating together Dubai and Pakistan.

Gwadar port is a major development initiative of the Pakistani government to capitalize on Pakistan's strategic oceanfront. It was envisioned to create a major Indian Ocean *entrepôt* and free-trade zone on Pakistan's coast, to compete with other major transit and trade hubs such as Singapore, Dubai, and Bandar Abbas. Imran highlighted the ways it threatened Dubai's salience as a hub. Gwadar is a natural deep sea port, he explained, whereas Dubai's port was "created," excavated by workers. For this reason its development required far less capital investment. Strategically, he continued, it is located west of Hamuz, and thus offering trans-ocean "supertankers" easier access. The Gwadar designers hoped to capture traffic that would otherwise use Dubai and its tax free zone. For this reason, Dubai opposed the project, he explained. To stymie the project, Dubai worked to undercut Pakistan's overall security and growth:

> Once the project started up, Dubai became involved, to bring it down. Because if it succeeds, then Dubai's economy goes down, and Pakistan's economy goes up. But it also ruined other aspects of [Pakistan's] condition. Because the Gulf people support the Taliban. The Saudis, the Emiratis, the Qataris, all supported the Taliban. Upon supporting them, this ruined the general environment of Pakistan, effectively diminishing the American's and other countries' interest in [developing and using] the port.
>
> [*Jab us kō start kiā, tō is mēṅ Dubai bhī involved huā, us kō down karnē kē liē. Kyūṅ-ki agar vo kāmyāb hō jātā, tō Dubai kī economic bhī down hō tī, aōr Pakistan kī economic ūper jā tē… Lēkan us kō mazīd ḥālāt udher ḵẖarāb kiā. Kyūṅ-kī Taliban support kiā, Gulf people. Gulf people supported the Taliban. Saudi Arabian people, Emirates people, Qatar people, supported the Taliban. aōr vo unhōnē support kiā us kō, phir Pakistan mēṅ mazīd … Pakistan mēṅ ziāda hālāt ḵẖarāb huā. aōr American interest, bāqī countries' contract …*]

The maintenance of Dubai's port drew Imran to work here, a system in which he earns a living, but in which he has developed himself too slowly—as I described in greater detail in Chapter 1. But furthermore, Dubai's support of the Taliban[66] effectively destabilizes Pakistan's security, and thus effectively disrupts the development of Gwadar, in Imran's explanation. Thus, by working at the Dubai port, Imran unwittingly perpetuates Pakistan's own slow development. To the extent that Taliban interests and Dubai economic interests align, Imran sees the experience of life under Taliban oppression and Dubai's labor regulations as part of the same fateful experience.

Crime stories, spatialization, and projection in Dubai

I dwell in this chapter, as my informants do, in the spatial gaps created through the restriction of information and of bodies—aspects of both Dubai's security culture and the sense of insecurity. Impacted by sectarian conflict and neoliberal policies, I track the forms of storytelling around crime and insecurity that rush to make claims on reality in highly controlled and surveilled spaces. A culture and strategy of government information-withholding multiplies the range of possible scenarios. As I initially drafted this chapter in the summer of 2014, international news media reported recent violent confrontations factions in Israel and Palestine. In the competing narratives of perpetrators and victims, conveyed via

[66] This view could reflect the region's Sunni politics, and more concretely the establishment of the Taliban's diplomatic "office" in Doha, announced in 2011 and opened in 2013. On the history of Gulf support of the Taliban see for instance Guelke (2006, 55) and Declan Walsh, 2010, "WikiLeaks cables portray Saudi Arabia as a cash machine for terrorists," *The Guardian*, December 5, Available online [accessed February 22, 2016]: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/05/wikileaks-cables-saudi-terrorist-funding

news reports, a bomb that destroys multiple Palestinian homes and lives may be alternately attributable to the Israeli Army or Hamas action.

Narratives gain force in contexts evacuated of information, people, actions, images, and things. Joao Biehl describes the persistence of life in zones of "social abandonment" in Brazil: centers which accept destitute individuals who are isolated from outside worlds and interred in varying states of dying (Biehl 2013, 5-8). Weaker individuals cling desperately to found materials—"a empty bottle, a piece of sugar cane"—an effort, he believes, to avoid the isolation of an impending death (41). Others who are more active commit themselves to narrating their past and present life. Storytelling here is an activity that fills a void; that which organizes a subjective collectivity "in terms of lack" (24).

To explore the life of narrative in Dubai's zones of public order and information-restriction, I turn now to another key episode from fieldwork. Two close contacts and I sat on the steps behind the central Shia mosque in Dubai, on one Sunday night of relative downtime. Asgar was in his early 20s, younger than most in this tight-knit circle peers, into which I immersed myself. Asgar was unmarried in Dubai, he was the primary financial supporter to his family at home. He was the de facto head of household to his family, as his father had died to two years prior and he was the only male child. Motivated to support his mother and sisters in Karachi, he had accepted his current job in Dubai through the referral of a friend in Karachi shortly after his father's death.

Asgar was an accountant employed with a small architectural company run by a Pakistani Shia. Around the time of our meeting on mosque's back steps, he was

trying to confront an issue in which his boss would not let him apply for work elsewhere. His boss would not let him leave his current job nor would he allow him to train himself to take on a higher position in the company. Asgar believed himself to be sorely underpaid; he could not support his family on this job, and was desperate. He often complained that, even though his boss was Shia, he was not virtuous or fair. Still, Asgar had a cheerful and calm affect, and was well-liked in the Shia community, where he often helped serve snacks and recite poetry at gathering events.

Asgar, though born in Pakistan, described himself as Iranian, his grandparents having emigrated from Iran to Karachi, he told me. Sharif—our other mutual friend present that night—also had a family recently settled in Karachi. Sharif was Pathan; his father had immigrated from Swat to Karachi for a new job opportunity. Like Latif, Sharif belonged to a Pashto tribe in the Karlanri family of tribes. Sharif was more successful and independent in Dubai than most in this group, having brought his wife and child to live with him there in a small apartment.

The mosque's back door opened onto a sandy lot that served as overflow parking and a public meeting space. This was a quiet and dark space on a Sunday night in September, about one month after Ramadan, after the busy nightly gatherings that transformed the space had ended. This was downtime. Our conversation began as a reflection on rising rents in the neighborhoods near the mosque, which then led Asgar and Sharif to recap some of their personal and family financial concerns. Perhaps given the environment of outdoor quiet and empty seclusion, allowing both "space" of the conversation to meander and the sense of

security of not being overheard, the conversation came around to the question of security in Dubai. It was an opportunity for them to work through some anxieties particular to Dubai, particularly those about unusual, unexplained, or unsettling events. Yet as the brief conversation unfolded, it also tied in anxieties about Pakistan, including details and referents that qualified and contrasted with those criminal activities in Dubai.

The stories built on each other: one relating a Dubai-based event led into another referring back to a Pakistan-based event. As they started to think of their own examples about insecurity and crime in Dubai, their tellings became more animated. The stories built on and reinforced one another as they unfolded. At times, details Asgar provided seemed to prompt the recollection of a related story or anecdote from Sharif, and vice versa. Mostly they "told" the stories for my benefit, addressing me, but in the spirit of building on one another, they also addressed each other.

The first story below begins this way, for instance. Asgar addressed Sharif directly, with Sharif interjecting exclamations that indicated interested listening. "*Acchā*, *Chinese ne?*" Sharif interjects at one point, for instance (implying surprise, similar to the exclamation "you don't say?" in English). Especially near the beginning of the conversation, I also intervened and tried to provoke them a bit, interjecting my feeling that Dubai was a very safe place—as compared to cities like Karachi and Baltimore—the latter where I had lived as a graduate student for the years preceding my research in Dubai. Sharif agreed but qualified the claim: "Compared to Karachi, Dubai is 100% safe. Dubai is safe because of the rule, of law and order. But

you can't say it's 'safe.' You have to be careful." Later he recapitulated this idea, saying "Dubai is very safe, yet anything can happen here."

Below, I highlight some of eleven key stories or story fragments from the conversation between Asgar, Sharif, and myself on that night. But first, let me begin by offering an excerpt from the conversation as it actually unfolded as a real-time narrative. This will help to provide a sense of the logical connections between the narrative pieces, how the conversation meandered, how Asgar and Sharif reacted to each others' tellings and to my occasional interjections and gentle provocations. Presenting a real-time snippet also helps me illustrate how the inherent contradiction in Sharif's general statement that "Dubai is safe, but we can't say it is safe / we have to be careful" manifested as contradictions as the narrative itself morphed. In the section of the conversation where I begin my transcription below, Sharif begins by talking about crimes in Karachi.

> Sharif: Street crimes are very … very much there. Because …
> Brian: Street crimes?
> Asgar: Ya…. *iPhone agar dēkh liā* … [if they see your iPhone…]
> Sharif: I take only this mobile outside, when I go, Karachi … I keep all mobile and watch and everything there at home, and I take this. If someone comes and asks mobile, I give them only this.
> Asgar: *Mērā bhī talāshī hōgī … ēk bār, mērī pās ēk hazār rupee thā …* [they also searched me once … and I had 1000 rupees]
> Brian: They'll come with *chāqū* … [knife]
> Sharif: They kill you, if you don't give him they just …. It happens everyday.
> Brian: Same in the U.S. In U.S. cities it also happens.
> Sharif: But here it is very safe, as compared to U.S.
> Asgar: Because of public transport here. In Karachi they can hijack whole bus.
> Sharif: In Karachi … whole bus.
> Brian: Really?
> Sharif: Ya. Running bus. They go through … one man goes to the driver, give the gun … and says, "keep driving." So he drives, and two

persons behind they collect everything from everybody. After that they tell him to stop, they jump, and run.
Brian: Ya … ya Karachi is dangerous I think.
[pause of 10 seconds.]
Asgar: And same here in Satwa. If someone ask you to stop the car, don't stop. If he is not *shurṭa* [police].
Sharif: Satwa? *Acchā* [OK].

In storytelling here, I note how Asgar and Sharif build on and react to each other in real time, in a way that reflects what Michael Jackson noted of group storytelling as a form of "dialogical interplay" (Jackson 2005, 358). I also note how in the course of the conversational arch, after considering initially considering the prevalence of street crimes in Karachi, Sharif returns his attention briefly back to Dubai, saying: "but here it is very safe." Still, only a minute later, Asgar appears to contradict Sharif's sentiment, when he suggests that a car-jacking could also occur in Dubai: "if someone ask you to stop the car, don't stop." I believe that this type of contradiction, made apparent when the stories they told are presented as they unfolded in real time, reflects a broader paradox of Dubai from the migrant perspective: a place safe by outward appearance but unsafe by virtue of concealed criminal activity.

Over the course of my entire conversation with Asgar and Sharif that night, which lasted roughly fifteen minutes, he and Asgar gave a variety of examples to support the suggestion—as I took it—that even though the crime rate was low, strange and unusual criminal events do frequently occur in Dubai. Similar to the range of stories Rafiq told me, I divide their stories into a) those that relate a specific event, and b) those that constitute a generalized crime-trope: a type of occurrence that could happen or tends to happen. Stories in the second category are told in a subjunctive "could-be" mood, while in the first are told in a definitive past tense.

Examples in the first category are purported crimes, not reported in the news but transmitted within the community orally, as a rumor. As such their credibility is rooted in particular materials, concrete images, and unsettling details: a "locked refrigerator" a "rolled-up prayer rug," as we will see in the examples below. Stories of the second category are received, and often generalized, from "verified" or verifiable written and media accounts.

The stories Asgar and Sharif told, and the crime-tropes they described, ranged in completeness and complexity. Some stories are only fragments, before the conversation shifted, or one person interrupted the other. I've tried to outline the various stories, story-tropes, and fragments below. In the chart, I have preserved the order in which they occurred in the conversation, by numbering them along the left side. Narratives in the first category are also filled with more concrete, material, and visually-specific details, and I have made an effort to highlighted in boldface those details below as well. Mostly, Asgar spoke in Urdu and Sharif spoke in English in the conversation, though I present the English translation throughout.

Table 4.3

Section A: Specific instances of criminal events
(both experienced first-hand and proported)

Story	Location
(1) Asgar: *Chinese people abducted a young girl—the Emirates Mall security camera captured the abduction. They took her to International City* [an outlying district inhabited by mostly Asian migrant workers and their families], *where they kept her in a* ***locked refrigerator****. The refrigerator was found in an outdoor trash area. She was discovered there when someone opened the refrigerator.*	Dubai, International City section

(3) Asgar: *About 6-7 months ago—you know that mosque,* ***the steel one****? A Filipino guy was found dead there, rolled up in the outdoor* ***prayer rugs****. They unrolled the rugs for fajr* [early morning] *prayers and found his body.* (a centrally located mosque within a busy bus station in a market square).	Dubai, Satwa bus station
(6) Asgar: *Once a guy stopped me, with a knife. I had 1000 rupees* [roughly 10 U.S. dollars] *on me …*	Karachi
(8) Asgar (echoed by Sharif): [referring to central district inhabited by mostly South Asian Muslim working men] *There are dark alleys. Other Pakistanis don't talk to me there at night. If you wear* ***salwār qamīẓ*** *they won't bother you. If it's a Bengali, they won't rob him. Because once they* [some Pakistani guys] *picked up/kidnapped a Pathan. That Pathan didn't see who it was, and hit them / beat them up.* [Asgar laughs] *So it wasn't a crime* (crime tō unhōnē nahīṅ kiā) *and those guys* [who got hit] *didn't tell the police.*	Dubai, Satwa residential area
(9) Sharif: *A man was found with his throat slashed in a sheesha parlor, known to be a prostitution house, at 6 in the morning. Two Moroccan Arab women, sex workers, were accused of the crime. That area is very dangerous and known for crimes like this. In that* ***specific 2 sq km*** *area you will find more than* ***40 beauty centers and sheesha parlors*** [fronts for prostitution]. *Mostly Arab* [African] *female sex workers are found there. Maybe he was drunk, because it's not easy to cut the throat of a male, even for two women. The sheesh parlor reopened the next day …*	Dubai, residential area of Deira, near Sharjah border

Section B: Generalized crime-tropes conveyed as potential events or types of event

Story	Location
(2) Sharif (in English): *In Sharjah, it's very bad. They* [referent indeterminate] *enter homes if your door is not locked. Usually family--the housewives are inside. Because the man is working, and the kids go to school, housewives are alone at home. If the door is not locked, they go inside, and rape and kill. Two or three times, I saw it in Gulf News. Because they can't hide a family murder or woman murder. They will investigate that, and it comes in the media.*	Sharjah (neighboring Emirate to Dubai)

(4) Asgar: *In Karachi, if there is a criminal committing a crime, he does not fear being seen by the police. Rather he cannot let himself be seen by the public …* Sharif (in English): *Because if he is caught on site, he will be killed there, by the people.* Asgar: *… with weapons, everyone has weapons …* Sharif: *No not with weapons. With trash* (ganda) *and with stones. Because they know if they give him to the police, they will release him, after collecting bribes. That's why people are very crazy there.*	Karachi
(5) Asgar: *If they see an iPhone …* Sharif: *I take only this mobile outside, when I go out in Karachi, I keep my other mobiles, my watch, and everything at home. If someone comes and asks for my mobile, I give them this. Because they'll kill you, if you don't give it to him*.	Karachi
(7) Asgar: *In Karachi, they* [referent indeterminate] *can hijack a whole bus …* Sharif: *a running bus. One man goes to the driver, and says "keep driving." So he drives, and two other people collect everything from everybody. After that, they tell him to stop, they jump, and run.*	Karachi
(10) Sharif: *Even if you are driving, and you are following the rules, you never know … someone could come from this side and that side of you, and hit you. Anything could happen …*	Dubai
(11) Sharif: *The same people who do crimes in Karachi and in Pakistan, they come here and stay very … human. They behave like humans. The same person, if he had murdered 4-5 people in Pakistan, he'll come here and behave.*	Dubai and Pakistan

Several patterns emerge, I suggest, when the information is organized in this way. Focusing on the specific and peculiar concrete details deployed in the stories in the Section A above, for instance, reveals the central role of concealment in the criminal acts themselves. That specific crimes involve an element of concealment is, of course, consistent with the idea that criminal activity belies the outward sense of public order in Dubai, and the relatively low officially-reported rates. The details suggest Asgar and Sharif's broader anxiety about what is hidden in Dubai. That which may be inside the locked refrigerator, rolled inside prayer rugs, or concealed

behind beauty parlor storefronts, might be sinister, menacing, surprising, and fearsome, as the speculative tone of their stories conveys.

Anxiety over concealed criminal acts also reflects foreign-migrant anxieties over the secrecy of the state's regulatory enterprises as well. As I described above, Asgar worried about how he would continue to support his family in Pakistan if he could not increase his income. But still, he hesitated to talk to his boss, lest he loose his job completely. As I explained in my introduction to this chapter, the state uses uncertainty and secrecy as a tool to manage the foreign population, partly by manipulating the fear of the native population. The state's *kafāla* system institutionalizes a) employers' control over workers' movement and career development, and b) the impermanence of foreign workers. The idea that "anything can happen" in Dubai, in other words, also captures the sense of uncertainty migrant's feel over their employment and residency statuses.

Unpredictability is a theme across the stories above, of events located in Dubai. The Dubai-based story 8 above, for instance, breaks the general rule presented in the Pakistan-based story 5, implied in story 6 and in Rafiq's kidnapping ordeal, of the importance to accent to victimhood. In stories 5 and 6 above, this is the importance to submit to the mugging and give the thief what he wants, lest he kill you on the spot. This partly explains the humor in story 8, in which the Pathan "doesn't see" his attackers or kidnappers very well—suggesting that the Pathan was not scared by them, and perhaps didn't see weapons. So he attacked them, Asgar explains with some amusement: a surprising turn of events. Thus, while all the players in this in the #8 narrative are Pakistani, and similar events play out in

Karachi "everyday," the outcome here in Dubai's environment of unpredictability is different.

Purported crimes in Dubai are, I argue, structured by this uncertainty and unpredictability. In story 9, Sharif speculates about how two ladies could have slashed the throat of a "full grown man." Sharif's tones of disbelief, as Asgar told the story about the crime perpetrated by Chinese individuals in story 1 above, suggest some perplexity over what motived the crime, especially in light of the lurid details. Still, at least one story appears to combine these themes of unpredictability and peculiarity with more familiar fears. Story 3 above is notably embedded in a world of religious materials: a glittering bus-station mosque made of sheet metal, large rolled up rugs for group prayer, the unsuspecting caretakers unrolling them the following morning. Who are the culprits? Compared to the other stories, few clues are provided here.

I argue that the emphasis on religious materials in story 3 reflects particular anxieties about religious violence felt by Asgar and Sharif, and by Latif and Rafiq. Though it is a central feature of this story, religious violence is otherwise foreign to Dubai. Rather, it is deeply rooted in the experience of Muslim minorities in Pakistan, an experience these men share. The religious texture of violence in Pakistan seems to infuse this story. Its details are an expression of particular (and familiar) anxieties located elsewhere.

Conclusion: Empty space and narrative life

Criminals operate with impunity in Pakistan. Criminal acts occur in public, and narrative recollections focus on the daring acts themselves: hijacking a moving bus, shooting people on roadside. In Dubai, the criminal event is often unseen, and the narrative focuses on after-the-fact discoveries, often of a dead body, for instance. At stake in these distinctions are different configurations of public space. Regulations and police enforcement in Dubai create subdued public outdoor environments, evacuated of activities, including criminal activities. There is a counterpoint between this environment and a) the "degeneration and devastation" particular to the religious and public environments of modern urban Pakistan, in general (Khan 2010, 504), and b) the violent and lurid content of the stories Asgar and Sharif tell. Through crime storytelling, immediate emptied spaces become populated with the anxieties of elsewhere, both of Pakistan and of concealed criminality in Dubai.

What do narratives do in spaces evacuated of information and activity? Of course, oral tellings transgress boundaries of space and time; they bring events bounded in particular times and places outside themselves. As such, tellings rework space in multiple ways. The visual environment we occupied on that night transformed before us through this conversation. The dark vacant lot, the shadow cast by the large tree before us, the uneven earth, passing vehicles, are all gathered up in the story and merged to those narrated materials and actions, by chance and by co-occurrence. The signifieds come to occupy a common signifier: a process in which the strange is made familiar. Narratives work on space, reassembling materials into new assemblages via anxious logics.

In my analysis of the stories told by Asgar, Sharif, and Rafiq above, I note their efforts to "ground" their tellings about concealed or distant events in concrete details. I argue that this effort to ground a narrative in detail is a particular ethic of storytelling, and also a reaction to broader forms of instability that migrants face in Dubai. In this way, storytelling works to "emplace" anxieties in the environment as a way to occupy space and secure knowledge about environments: to make the nefarious and mysterious appear familiar. I take "grounding" as an ethic of migrant life particular to the struggle against worklife instabilities and concealed criminal forces.

I also identify "reflection" as an ethic of storytelling particular to the accounts of Rafiq, Asgar, and Sharif. Narrative meandering and reflection allows Asgar and Sharif, for instance, to transition fluidly between examples related to Dubai and those related to Pakistan, providing an opportunity to project anxieties of elsewhere into the real-time and immediate present. As I have argued, this ethic of wandering rumination in storytelling is enabled by an ambience of idleness particular to moments and phases downtime. For Asgar and Rafiq in particular, I argue that this ethic of wandering particular to storytelling structures other forms of rumination about the struggles of unemployment and underemployment, in downtime moments and spaces related to those in which they told stories about their knowledge of criminal activity and experiences of victimhood. I thus observe this ethic to structure various activities across domains of migrant life in Dubai.

That memories of violence in Pakistan saturate anxieties about concealed nefarious forces in Dubai—for Pakistanis living in Dubai—is perhaps not surprising.

John Borneman has examined the work of dreams among men in Syria, to subsume anxieties and allow the actors to contend with varieties of violence in their daily lives. Dreams, daydreams, and "reverie" helped Borneman's informants "contextualize experience" and create "future communicative possibilities." They create a controlled space in which anxieties about real events can be expressed through "stand-in" figures and symbols.

To further consider the roles of dreaming, reflection, and imagination in inhabiting downtime environments in Dubai, I end by reconsidering qualities of boredom and stillness, which I first introduced above via the work of Orrantia and Stewart. Walter Benjamin tracked boredom as an outcome of both a) the tempos and repetitive rhythms of urban labor in the industrial and post-industrial era, and b) the ambulatory rhythms of the *flaneurs* in Paris, characterized at one point in *The Arcades Project* as "the great idlers, the waterfront loafers and the vagabonds" (Benjamin 1999, 104) Crucially, Benjamin constructs the boredom of the *flaneur* in relation to the Parisian environment of sedimentary decay, mud, and dust. In one scene, for instance, organized under the subheading "Dust and Stifled Perspective," he presents the figure of a woman walking with a dress with a long train, stirring up street dust as she goes (103). Another strongly conveys the dull, dusty, and monotone features of the physical environment:

> Recently deposited limestone—the bed on which Paris rests—readily crumbles into a dust which, like all limestone dust, is very painful to the eyes and lungs…. Here is the source of the unprepossessing bleached gray of the houses, which are all built from the brittle limestone mined near Paris; here, too, the origin of the dun-colored slate roofs that blacken with soot over the years. (108)

In turn, he later describes this sense of boredom as the "fabric" in which we "wrap ourselves when we dream," and the *flaneur's* ambulation as the "rhythmics of this slumber" (105-106). I suppose that there is a kinship between the environment of the vacant sand lot in Dubai, where Asgar, Sharif and I chatted idly one night, and the limestone dust-caked streets and buildings in the Paris of Benjamin's early-twentieth century *flaneur*. In both cases, the dull and sedimentary environment produces the affect of boredom which prompt flights of dreamlike imagination.

Do visually and dynamically-restrained environments prompt lines of imagination? Building on the perspective advanced by Vincent Crapanzano, how might the real immediate world be "entangled" with the imaginary? Under what conditions might elements or objects in the immediate landscape—as in a landscape painting, for instance—inspire the viewer to "imagine" what lies concealed beyond (or within) these objects (Crapanzano 2004, 17, 24-25)? This chapter has considered how the environment of public security and public order in Dubai produces low-contrast, subdued, and muted spaces that stage and inspire anxieties tied to elsewhere. Furthermore, the examples have considered how the visual horizons of concrete things and discrete spaces in the physical environment prompt imaginations about what is not seen and not-present: that which lies beyond.

5. Constraint

Sound, noise, containment, partitioning, pitch, *wāʿẓī*

I lay flat against a thin mattress on the hard concrete floor, in total darkness. The room I had occupied for over a month was cavernous, but I enclosed myself at night behind a mosquito net. The *majlis* that I had attended earlier that night—at a Sufi shrine and imāmbārgāh center situated in this rural north Indian village, perhaps a five minute walk from my room—continued to ring out over loudspeakers, reverberating inside and outside the room, loudly but indistinctly. I strained to catch the words.

The shrine itself, perched on a mound, is the highest point in the village. In one direction from the shrine, a market road extends down the gently-sloping acclivity, thickly-lined with shops and stalls. My room lay at the base of this slope in a different direction, part of an otherwise-vacant "pilgrims" accommodation lodge: a sparse property that filled to capacity with attendees on the occasion of large commemorative events at the shrine—most especially, the Saint's death anniversary. In the opposite direction from the lodge, fields of rice and wheat extended outward in an extensive patchwork dotted by farmer's huts and small farmhouses.

As I lay in the dark, I noted repeated references to Imam Ali—or "Ali Mōlā," in the reference of the reciters—but caught little else. The entombed saint's lineage is traced through the sixth Imam, and the site features a small imāmbārgāh off to one side of the main tomb. Similar to Shia commemorative practices across the Subcontinent, this Sufi shrine organized events in honor of the early Imams. This particular gathering commemorated Imam Ali's birth.

The sound of one vocal performance by a group of men, accompanied by a regular drumbeat, echoed loudly, but came through jumbled over the loudspeakers. The recitation was punctuated by the occasional sharp staccato of distortion and feedback noise. Given the otherwise quiet late-night environment of the densely settled village and farmland, I wondered how the performance sounds impacted other residents. In the ambient vicinity of the shrine, did residents also strain to listen, or did they strain to sleep? Were the performances received as mere background noise, or nuisance? Was the broadcast appreciated, begrudged, or effectively ignored?

Four years later in Dubai, a conversation with a Pakistani Shia man, working as a luxury car salesman, prompted me to reconsidered my experience in that village, on that night and others, during some "pre-dissertation" fieldwork in the summer of 2008 that I had been conducting there. The man was a convert from Sunni to Shia Islam, and joining him one day at an opulent Mughal-themed restaurant, he explained what had drawn him to Shi'ism, and how he practiced it. Despite his embrace, he challenged a variety of conventions in what he described as "traditional" Shia practice. As an example, he cited the tradition of organizing late-night *majlises* over loudspeakers in Pakistan. "What about their neighbors who are trying to sleep," he said at one point. He expressed his preference for the tradition of indoor and more-subdued *majlises* in Dubai, which corrected this "excessive" impulse to disrupt public space, in his view.

Focused on Dubai, this chapter explores the environmental forces and spatial containment practices that shape and configure aspects of vocal and bodily

performance in Shia expressive practices. I begin with this reference to my own earlier fieldwork in India to help illustrate the sonic aesthetics and ethics of performance particular to India that contrast with those salient in Dubai. Many community members made frequent "comparative" references in order to describe, and make sense of, their participation in Shia expressive rituals in Dubai. More generally, they asserted that restrictions—that is, the degree of *pābandī*—in Dubai exceeded those restrictions Shias felt elsewhere: both in India and Pakistan, and in Europe and America.

In this chapter, I conceive "constraint" as an ethic of religious expressive performance germane to the compartmentalized space of the recording studio, and an ethic of work in light of the compressed timeframes that structure daily routines. The experiences of Saad in the final sections below, who I initially introduced in the Introduction and Chapter 1, show how an ethics of constraint structures both domains of life. In describing an ethics of constraint tied to Shia experience and migrant worklife in Dubai, I build on other key studies in the anthropology of Islam that focused on the role of discipline, comportment, and compartmentalization in cultivating ethical practice in Islam. Studies have observed how the Islamic *aẕān*, or "call to prayer," serves to punctuate daily life (Khan 2011, 571-572), and how the performance of *ṣalāt* or "prayer" relies on the execution of "a fixed sequence of movements" (Bowen 1989, 601).

Saba Mahmood builds on Foucault's conception of ethics as a set of bodily techniques and spiritual exercises (Foucault 1988) to show how participants of Egypt's mosque movement hone disciplined ritual practices via an "elaborate

system of techniques" to cultivate piety (Mahmood 2005, 31). And Charles Hirschkind has shown how the effort to attune one's ear in the audition of sermons builds on a more basic forms of Islamic ethical discipline, tied for instance to the recitation and memorization of the Qur'an (Hirschkind 2006, 121). Through an ethics of "containment" or "constraint," I argue that members of this community adapt their worklife routines and forms of religious expression to the particular logics of regulation and spatial organization in Dubai.

Containment as creative improvisation

Centrally, this chapter aims to show how expressive commemorative performances in Shia Islam persist in indoor environments. I aim to show, in other words, how they thrive in spite of public space regulations. In particular, I trace how the partitioning of rooms and homes is a particular migrant strategy in Dubai aimed at reclaiming space, mitigating high housing costs, and "interiorizing" activities. The partitioning of space is a strategy of migrant life in response to the effects of regulatory and market forces. Furthermore, the practice of iterative partitioning of interior space—partitions of partitions—reaches its apogee, for the Shia community members I follow in this chapter, in the space of the recording studio, I argue.

Visually and sonically contained, expressive practices here thrive as they are shaped by both a) a sense of discipline and b) a spirit of improvisational ingenuity, cultivated in relation to regulations of public space in Dubai. Put another way, in this chapter I observe how the practices of partitioning interior space enable a proliferation of "interiorized" Shia expressive practices. I consider both practices—

the partitioning of interior space and the audio recording of poetic recitation—to be acts of creative improvisation conformed and enabled by the containment imperatives associated with the regulation of public space in Dubai. As such, my argument mirrors those of other anthropologists, about how forms of creative action adapt to, and are expanded by, "rational, bureaucratic, organizational structure" and forms of "rule-governed behavior." For instance, consider Eitan Wilf's exploration of the strategies of jazz students and educators to adapt their creative artistic process to the structures and logics of higher education institutions. Wilf tracks how jazz educators "use rule-governed techniques to reconfigure students' playing bodies and thus open up new creative horizons in their improvisations" (Wilf 2014, 12, 14).

Relatedly, consider Beatrice Jauregui's account of *jugād* in India, which she characterizes as a type of "everyday corruption." She describes *jugād* as a form of material or non-material improvisation or "bricolage,"[67] in which ordinary people appropriate transactional modes more-typically associated with the exercise of official power, such as corruption (Jauregui 2014, 76-79). She describes, for instance, a man who leverages his own "connection" within the Lucknow police in order to avoid paying a bribe demanded by another police officer. Both Wilf and Jauregui's studies examine creative practices that appropriate bureaucratic structures and modes of transaction. Similar to Wilf's study of jazz education, I focus on how regulations transform forms of creative expression, such as Shia poetry

[67] Here, Jauregui references Levi-Strauss's formulation of the concept, as an process of building with raw materials that are already engineered and available in the immediate environment: a process of "reorganization" and "reconstruction" to produce novel new arrangements and creations. (Levi-Strauss 1966, 16-22)

recitation. And like Jauregui's study, I examine "partitioning" as a type of bricolage that is both a) particular to working class survival and b) incorporates the logic of the maintenance of public order. I develop this argument further below, as I explore the intersection of containment practices and modes of Shia expression particular in the Indo-Pakistan migrant community in Dubai.

Acoustemology of Shia expressive ritual: ʿazādārī

I argue that a focus on the "sonic" aspects of Shia expressive rituals will illuminate how performers and participants adapt to state regulatory forces. Forms of Shia poetic ritual loosely categorized as "*ʿazādārī*," in South Asian culture, are among the most sonically-varied—to the extent that they incorporate vocal and non-vocal sonic productions—and provide a starting point for my analysis. Typically, in *ʿazādārī*, regular rhythmic chest beating punctuates the performance of poetry. Chest beats add a percussive and sometimes-raucous quality to the sonic performance, as participants beat themselves with varying degrees of forcefulness, depending on their own "taste" preferences and on what the regulatory environment allows.

To begin to unpack the relationship between environmental forces and expressive performance, let me first examine more closely this set of non-tonal sounds in *ʿazādārī*. Primarily, such sounds include percussive chest beats (which accompany *mātam* performance) and wailing (of audience members during *nōḥa* or *marṣiya* performance). Functionally, what do such sounds, or noises, add to poetic recitations? In one way, I suppose that these "sounds" evoke the sonic

environment—and the sense of profound urgency and tragedy—at the Battle of Karbala itself. I suggest, in other words, that these modern-day rituals function to reenact visceral aspects of Hussain's party's fateful encounter with the Yazidis.[68]

I heard one *marṣiya*[69] in Dubai, for instance—both performed live and viewed as a YouTube video on one research participant's phone—that describes the painful first-hand experience of the women in Hussain's tent. The poem refers both to the trauma of Karbala and of the trials of captivity thereafter. Performed by men or women and accompanied by chest beats, this first person account in the poem floats between Zainab[70] and Sakina[71]:

Hāth kānōṅ pe hē, nīl gālōṅ pe hē
Aōr nishān jō Sakina kī shānō pe hē
Har nishān sē yehī ārahī hē sadā, bābā jān, bābā jān

Shām-e-'āshur se, shām-o-Kufa tak,
Meṅ ne mānga nahīṅ he khirāj-e Fadak,
Mērī chādar sē hē, mērī mān kā sukūn, sūn lē zālim jahān

> [Hands on my ears and bruises on my cheeks
> There are marks on Sakina's shoulders
> And from every mark comes the call "oh father, oh father!"
>
> From the eve of 'Āshūrā[72] to the eve of Kufa[73]
> I have never once demanded my rights to Fadak[74]
> From my blanket, and my mother's comfort, I hear the tyrant outside!]

Performed vocally and through hands clapping chests and heads, wounds here gain a sonic texture at the intersection of the strike and the vocalized cry: both the

[68] Yazid is the Caliph to whom Hussain refused to give allegiance. Yazid's army intercepted Hussain's contingent at Karbala, forcefully prevent their onward march to Kufa, in the month of Muharram in 680 A.D.
[69] An elegy commemorating Imam Hussain and/or the Battle of Karbala specifically.
[70] Hussain's sister.
[71] Hussain's daughter, age 4 at the time of Karbala.
[72] The tenth day of Muharram, 680 CE, the day of Hussain's martyrdom
[73] The party of captive survivors arrived in Kufa two days later.
[74] The village that Muhammad bequeathed to Fatima (Zainab's father), though the

present-day performers' cries and wounds, and those of the Imam's immediate family members. The muffled cries of the ladies and babies in Hussain's tent, and the dull visceral thuds of arrows and swords piercing the skin of Hussain and his family members and associates, "ring" in the forms of chest beating and wailing of modern Shia rituals, I argue. This poem's performance (in the present-day) evokes both the painful sonic experience of Karbala and its aftermath, and "bodies" forth a call to protest Hussain's fate. Protest is key aspect of *'azādārī*, which I explore further below.

Expressive range

Disagreements over the utility of "excessive" rituals in Shia practice, including the rituals associated with *'azādārī*, often reflect taste preferences, as I argued in Chapters 2 above. Still, many I worked with in Dubai agreed that *'azādārī* performances in Dubai are generally more subdued and restrained compared to those in India and Pakistan. As a consequence, many also attested to participation rates at *imāmbārgāhs* gatherings being lower, partly in light of indoor space restrictions. I noted, on the occasion of Imam Ali's death anniversary—a major commemoration day—how imāmbārgāh staff allowed attendees to enter and fill the small courtyard area in front of one imāmbārgāh until it reached capacity, and thereafter turned away people who began to congregate on the sidewalk outside, advising them to disperse.

Reciters are less active in public settings as well. Saad, a reciter of poetry who I introduced in Chapter 1 and chronicle in greater detail below, explained to me that

he performs live recitations less frequently than he did years earlier in Lucknow, his home city. Alternatively, he described how he tries to avail the opportunity to reserve time at his friend's recording studio in Sharjah whenever he has enough money to cover the production costs. Though it strained his work schedule—given his long hours as a salesman in a small shop—he tries to make a recording once per year, far more than he would be able to accomplish in India, he said.

I aim to show below how the studio environment is well-suited to an ethic of compartmentalization central to the state's approach to public space regulation in the U.A.E. Furthermore, I show below how in the recording studio environment, performers adopt different ethics of vocal production than they do performing live, especially: pitch discipline and tonal "beauty." From the "forceful" public square gatherings (*markazī julūs*) in Pakistan to the highly-disciplined performances at recording studios in Dubai and Sharjah—themselves embedded in the wider regulated, partitioned, and insulated structure of "migrant" life in the U.A.E.—Shia expressive productions run a wide range of sonic intensity. In part, I argue that such a range is enabled by practitioners' assessment that such rituals have indeterminate value. For practicing Muslims, *ṣawāb* (or "spiritual benefit") accrues through a variety the *ḥalāl* (accepted), *mustaḥabb* (recommended) and *wājib* (mandatory) actions performed in everyday life.

Discussing this issue among others, I sat one night in late September, in an large vacant lot flanked on two sides by busy roads, sipping tea and chatting with one central Pakistani informant—Imran—who worked a nearby camp accommodation. He described the role and importance of *'azādārī* to me this way:

> The benefit of *'azādārī* and *majlis* has no "meter." We've been told about the benefit of prayer, the benefit of performing *ḥajj*, the benefit of giving alms … but for *'azādārī* and *majlis* there is "no measurement" of the benefit gained. We really cannot imagine it [*brain sē bahut ziyāda*].

Assessments like these lead many Pakistanis, Imran explains, including himself, to seek out *mātam* experiences.[75] However the indeterminacy of *'azādārī* as a relatively unstructured form of worship (*'ibādat*) also allows practitioners greater flexibility to perform it: for instance, to adapt it in relation to environmental factors that limit sonic performance.

Gulf connections to the global economy, and the fate of Shia rituals

In the United Arab Emirates, I argue that the regulation of noise is a proxy for the regulation of Shia rituals in general. Furthermore, several informants described to me how state authorities restrict public forms of *'azādārī* in an effort to create a business-friendly and tourism-friendly environment. Civic ordinances reflect a Western logic of noise containment, invoking standards set by the World Health Organization: a civic policy consistent with a cultivating public order. But the link between a) the suppression of Shia public rituals, b) their proliferation in the private spaces of homes, mosques, and imāmbārgāhs, and c) the opening of Arabian Gulf economies has a longer history in the region.

State distrust toward Shia populations in Gulf states is a legacy of the influence of Saudi Wahhabism in the region: a key political-theological alliance dating to the mid-eighteenth century in central Arabia. As a political strategy, Ibn

[75] This refers to the heightened final poetic phase of the *majlis*, characterized often by rhythmic chanting and loud/forceful chest-beating accompaniment).

Saud reestablished a partnership with Wahhabi *'ulamā'* (religious leadership) and *ikhwān* (militarized groups) in the early twentieth century, to launch a phase of territorial expansion that began with his recapture of Riyadh in 1902, and continued through his establishment of the modern "Saudi Arabian" state in 1932, and beyond. With the *'ulamā'*, Ibn Saud established an early form of the type of "clientalistic" patronage that would come to define the structure of the Saudi state (Hertog 2010, 60).

Particularly in the 1920s, Ibn Saud pursued a national unification policy that aimed to harness the spirit of Islamic unification in Wahhabi ideology, while adjusting and "taming" it to both a) include Shias in the formation of the new nation, and b) facilitate an open trade economy with others in the region, in Asia, and the West (Commins 2009, 71-72). The Wahhabi doctrine supports an interpretation of Shi'ism as polytheistic and therefore un-Islamic, creating a confrontation between Wahhabi forces and the majority Shia populations in the east-central portions of the Arabian Peninsula, one into which Ibn Saud necessarily inserted himself. In 1920, and again in 1927, *ikhwān* forces in the Eastern oasis town Hasa pushed for a prohibition against Shias "praying in public" and publicly "observing the anniversaries of the Prophet's and his relatives deaths:" that is, against the public commemoration of the martyrdom of the Shia "infallibles"[76] (Vassiliev 2013, 298). During that timeframe, Al Saud forces countered and forcefully suppressed the *ikhwān* from implementing their most-zealous ambitions: to force the conversion of Shia populations. By 1928, in an attempt to appease both Shia and Wahhabi factions,

[76] That is, the twelve Shia Imams plus Fatimah and the Prophet Muhammad.

Al Saud enacted a policy to "tolerate private Shiite religious ceremonies," while still prohibiting public rituals and limiting the community in other ways: prohibiting the construction of new mosques and religious schools, for instance (Commins 2009, 75-76).

The effort to restrict Shia commemorative practices by forcing them into indoor private spaces—part of a broader strategy to temper Islamic purification ideologies with a globally-connected economic policy—survives through the present-day. Ethnographic accounts from Saudi Arabia in the mid-2000s note that while Shias perform public rituals in the oasis city Qatif, Shia are still "discrete" and perform religious functions "in the privacy of their homes or in their mosques and *huseiniyya*" in Hasa (Louër 2011, 222). This effort to contain Shia rituals in interior private spaces reflects what I observed in my own Dubai-based research. Still, the influence of Wahhabi purification ideology endures in the region today, as Shia protests were forcefully suppressed in Bahrain and eastern Saudi Arabia during events associated with 2011's "Arab Spring" uprising (see Matthiesen 2013).

In April 2012, I met a Bahraini Arab student, a Shia, who had immigrated to Dubai to pursue business training, and now searched of work. In a long conversation, while sitting behind the Shia mosque one evening, he reminisced and registered disappointment about the fate of mass protests in Bahrain in the previous year. Though protesters emphasized a unified "Islamic" and "national unity" quest for justice, tensions with the Bahraini state have a strong sectarian character. Members of the majority-Shia population feel mistreated by the Sunni royal family there, with close ties to Saudi Arabia, and the leadership were quick to cast the

uprising in the sectarian terms of "Shia threat," invoking the proxy-threat of Iranian influence, for instance (Matthiesen 2013, 1, 4, 19).

My Bahraini friend mentioned disapprovingly how the United Arab Emirates had sent troops to Bahrain to help suppress mass protests. Still, he admired the Emirates for creating "an environment safe for business development," I recorded in my notes. The solace that Gulf Shias, like my Bahraini friend in Dubai, find in state efforts to create a "business-friendly" environment has a long history, if we understand the key efforts of Al Saud to temper Wahhabism's "xenophobic impulses" to make Saudi Arabia viable "in the international arena" (Commins 2009, 71-72). That viability included both protecting minority non-Sunni groups and encouraging foreign investment and trade. While the Shias face varying degrees of political mistrust and suppression across Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the U.A.E., practicing Shias cultivate interior spaces in which to perform rituals amid economic and regulatory policies designed to forge and protect global connections.

ʿazādārī *as protest: The imperative to reach non-Shias*

Functionally, *ʿazādārī*—a form of expressive performance—is also a form of protest. In the Pakistani context, *ʿazādārī*'s valuation as protest typically entails the obligation to reach non-Shia neighbors, to convey the unjust events of Karbala. As my informant Imran explains, in our late night conversation—in a way that echoes what a variety of informants told me: "When we protest, the people in the vicinity who don't know about Karbala will ask one another, 'why are these people performing like this?' In this way, we convey the message." While the live public-

square loudspeaker performances in Pakistan may reach large and diverse local audiences, audio and video recorded forms of *'azādārī* circulate via various media and are also widely heard and consumed. In Chapter 2 above, I explored how people use social media platforms via mobile phones and computers to share, view, and listen to recordings of *'azādārī*, particularly those graphically and visually extreme examples. In this chapter, I consider the aesthetic values and ethical techniques tied to the *recording* of *'azādārī* —the process of capturing the recitation of elegies and percussive bodily performances—mostly as undertaken in the built space of one particular recording studio on the Dubai-Sharjah border, where I spent several late nights in September 2012.

While regulations in Dubai foreclose the type of Shia public protest typical to Pakistani cities and towns—cherished by many Pakistanis I worked with in Dubai—I argue that they support and facilitate the type of disciplined and restrained protest-performance cultivated in recording studio space. I document further below how space in Dubai is nested and compartmentalized, as property owners and renters divide and subdivide indoor spaces via partitions, in response to both soaring demand in the housing market and in the spirit of containment imperatives. Ultimately, I find that the same state regulatory factors that force public performances of *'azādārī* into enclosed private interior spaces—much to the chagrin of my Pakistani informants like Imran—also create the conditions that allow for new aesthetic performance and protest techniques. I argue that the private studio in Dubai replaces the public town square in Pakistan as the rudiment of the nation's expansion and development, and thus as the central site for minority and anti-

establishment contention, claims-making, subject-formation, creativity, and protest: in particular, in this case, as the nexus of Shia religious activity. Conforming to performance conventions germane to the recording studio allow Shias to reclaim space in Dubai, both creatively, and in a way consistent with the idioms of self-governance and self-discipline tied to projects of neoliberalism: a theme in many recent ethnographic studies of work and entrepreneurism in the Gulf region.

Neoliberalism in Dubai and migrant "self-discipline"

Many historical and anthropological accounts of Dubai take neoliberalism as a central organizing principle of state development (Kanna 2011, Vora 2013, Davidson 2008a, Davis 2006, Buckley 2013). A central tension in Dubai's development—which many commentators take as a tension of neoliberal projects generally—is that between freedom (of markets) and restriction (of civil liberties). Dubai may be considered neoliberal from various perspectives. 1) The discovery of oil in Gulf states like Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and neighboring Saudi Arabia, coincided with the emergence of a new global capitalist system after World War II, in which nations at the industrialized "core" reoriented production to take advantage of cheap labor available from developing nations. In other words, that a small (and narrowly defined) "native" citizen population came to hold the vast portion of wealth from oil rents is only partly a legacy of hydrocarbon reserves themselves. Rather, early oil companies—and eventually corporations throughout the region—were also well positioned to take advantage of opening labor markets to the east (Hanieh 2011, 53-55).

2) Dubai has long been connected into regional and trans-regional trade networks. At the turn of the 20th century, in a bid to raise its prominence as a port, the ruling Maktoum family eliminated the tariff system on Dubai's port, thereby offering an appealing alternative to the Gulf's northern rim ports such as Bandar Abbas and Bandar Lingah (Davidson 2007, 34). The emirate's commitment to free trade capitalism expanded in the 1970s with the development of large free-trade zones.

3) The political independence of the Gulf states (for instance, Saudi Arabia in 1932, U.A.E. in 1971) coincided roughly with the discovery of oil (1938 in Saudi Arabia, 1958 in Abu Dhabi, 1966 in Dubai). Historian Roger Owen has further noted that oil's discovery "served to reinforce [existing patterns of rule] by underpinning a system of interlocking interests, privileges, and monopolies" that structured Gulf state governance (Owen 2008, 3). Paternalistic forms of governance thus endured in the region, in part, as a consequence of oil production. Discrete governmental bureaucracies such as defense and religious administration are aligned vertically and centrally through the ruler. Income from oil rents allowed the Gulf leaders to strategically avoid horizontal alliances and partnerships (Hertog 2010, 10-13). A further "clientization of society" (Cammett et al. 2015, 329) is then effected in two ways. A) Through *kafāla*, citizens leverage their status in order to sponsor non-citizens' work permits. B) Native workers develop a sense of entrepreneurial spirit in work (Kanna 2011).

I argue, as other anthropologists have recently, that the experience of foreign workers in Dubai is best captured via a fourth component associated with neoliberal

projects: the role of the rational self-disciplining subject. Neha Vora suggests that Asian workers in Dubai are especially "governed by disciplinary practices," in which they are compelled to "police their behavior and speech," and in doing so "perform" citizenship and forge belonging in Dubai (Vora 2013, 3-4, 47). Her interpretation inflects a notion of government as that which transcends the political sphere. In developing this notion, usually translated as "the art of government," or "governmentality," Michel Foucault drew on Renaissance-era critiques of Machiavelli's notion of "transcendental" political power in *The Prince*. In particular, Foucault highlights the "upward and downward continuity" between

> the government of oneself, which falls under morality; the art of properly governing a family, which is part of economy; and finally, the "science of governing well" the state, which belongs to politics. (Foucault 2009, 132)

Like Vora, Ahmed Kanna suggests that political power in Gulf states operate as "disciplinary power," in which Asian expatriates in Dubai are not merely "passive objects:" "South Asian expatriates appropriate state-produced neoliberal constructions of Dubai and remake their place in the city as simultaneously agentive and systematically oppressed" (Kanna 2011, 16). Both Kanna and Vora emphasize the spirit and discipline associated with entrepreneurism in the Gulf, and draw on Aihwa Ong's work in Southeast Asia, in which she suggests, herself building on Foucault:

> "Neoliberal rationality … furnishes the concepts that inform the government of free individuals who are then induced to self-manage according to market principles of discipline, efficiency, and competitiveness." (Ong 2006, 4)

In this way, neoliberal forces not only aim to cultivate free markets, but also rational subjects and market actors.

My research participants—mostly South Asian men laboring in Dubai's growth sectors—often described their "feeling" for living and working in Dubai as "*majbūrī*," which can translate as compulsion or oppression, and which reflects a particular relationship to neoliberal state. As I began to describe in my introduction to this dissertation, and with respect to accounting in Chapter 4, *majbūrī* is partly the necessity to work and send money home to support their families. *Majbūrī* also expresses the feeling of having to live carefully within strict rules, laws and norms—often typified in our conversations related to road rules—set by the government and enforced by police. In an further example of migrant life in relation to road rules, I once walked with Nadim on a familiar route between the central *imāmbārgāh* to his work camp accommodation: a 20 minutes-long walk. I observed a gap in the oncoming traffic as we approached one main road, and began to rush across. Nadim suddenly stopped me, and then confronted me for not crossing at the designated crosswalk, which was a short walk further along the road. "We must follow the rules of Dubai," he explained to me as we walked together toward the pedestrian crossing. I gestured toward a few other young Asian men and women who appeared at that moment to be walking across the boulevard at a section away from the crosswalk. I also mentioned that I frequently crossed without seeking the crosswalk. He suggested that the "rules" might apply differently for someone of my background: a Westerner. But as an Asian migrant, he could not afford to take the chance.

That Nadim believed Asians were more likely and frequently targeted by police for public infractions (such as jaywalking) than White Anglos and Europeans reflects in part the neoliberal sense of rational self-governance, in which the state determines certain individuals and communities to be naturally undisciplined, deviant, and irrational. For instance, the U.S. State Department publishes advice intended for Americans traveling abroad, which reinforces popular assumptions—which I explored in the previous chapter—of "Asian migrants" as "highly concentrated" and prone to criminality:

> Reported crimes, to include homicides, tend to be within the expatriate population, which is predominately Asian and South Asian. Reporting indicates that most take place in the work camps.[77] The majority of crime is centered in high concentrations of low income containing temporary laborers originating from personnel from third country nations.[78] The expatriate workforce consists predominantly of single men. There have been reported cases of sexual assault or sexual harassment of women, including Americans.[79]

The archetype of the deviant, undisciplined, even lecherous single Asian man as a social problem in the Gulf is encapsulated in the figure of the "bachelor" in Dubai (see further Sarmadi 2013). In the discourse of the Shia recording studio in Dubai, I found this conception to be also reflected in descriptions of Urdu speech as *wāʿẓī* or "loud" and "coarse"—as I develop further in my discussion of pitch near the end of this chapter.

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[77] U.S. Department of State. 2013. *United Arab Emirates 2013 Crime and Safety Report: Abu Dhabi*. Available online [accessed Jan 13, 2016]: https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=13886

[78] U.S. Department of State. 2012. *United Arab Emirates 2012 Crime and Safety Report: Dubai*. Available online [accessed Jan 13, 2016]: https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=12119

[79] U.S. Department of State. 2012. *United Arab Emirates 2012 Crime and Safety Report: Abu Dhabi*. Available online [accessed Jan 13, 2016]: https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=12117

Generally, such neoliberal markets disenfranchise workers by a) perpetuating a system of global economy whereby the core advances by extracting cheap labor and resources from the developing periphery (at the expense of the periphery) and b) denying them formal belonging in the capitalist or rentier class, through the institution of non-citizenship. To this extent neoliberal forces are considered a problem—a form of diminishment—especially for (foreign) working classes. Yet this chapter aims to illustrate how the neoliberal values of self-discipline and restraint overlap with the specific techniques of studio recording of Shia commemoration poetry. I find that Shia performers creatively repurpose the neoliberal imperative to self-discipline, particular to Dubai's economic environment, in a way that is consistent with recording techniques, and thus with the techniques of efficacious religious ritual. In anther way, the environment thus creates the potential for the enrichment of the forms of minority religious activities that various restrictions in Dubai (of noise, for instance) are designed to suppress. Exploring religious "sites," such as *nōḥa* recording studios, that preserve the cultivated "serenity" of the public environment allows us to consider the work of "soft" technologies of state governance: technologies that force reciters of poetry to cultivate disciplined vocal and bodily performance, as I describe further below.

From the perspective of state regulation of public space, sound and noise productions pose particular challenges. In Dubai, this challenge is not only a function of highly diffuse and multi-directional character of sound wave radiation in general, but specifically of the conflict between sound regulation and the technologies and logic of visual surveillance. "Security" states like Dubai rely on

ocular-centric apparatuses for internal regulation—for instance, via surveillance cameras, as I discussed further in the previous chapter—and this impacts the spatial design of the city. For example, the prototypical "Islamic city" in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa features "narrow" and "convoluted street plans" as a security measure and means of protecting the gendered domestic spaces (Abu-Lughod 1987, 160-161). This design empowers locals to regulate security by more-easily identifying and interrogating "outsiders" (169, 172). Dubai, rather, features open public spaces designed to welcome outsiders and encourage global commerce. Such designs include the cavernous spaces of grandiose shopping malls, and the long wide boulevards of Dubai, that span parallel to the straight coastline of the Arabian Gulf. Both design types create unencumbered vistas well-suited to visual record keeping, reinforcing a visual-centric approach to both the city's design and internal regulation.

The logic of the regulation of noise and sound—that is, via containment and the construction of walls, as I show below—confounds the exercise of visual record-keeping and surveillance. Similarly, the need to create unencumbered lines-of-sight conflicts with the need to construct sound barriers. Notably, both forms of regulation—sonic containment and visual surveillance—function to control the foreign population. Striking a balance between *visual openness* and *sonic enclosure* is an abiding regulatory challenge for the state in Dubai, in light of a large foreign population that threatens to erode "Gulf" values, as I described in Chapter 4. I suppose that the conflicting logics lend a sense of urgency to both forms of regulatory exercise.

Religious sounds and colonial / post-colonial states

Global histories of noise record two major developments of the "modern" era. Industrialization ushered in mechanical noise, especially in cities. An influential futurist manifesto—which predicted the rise of the 20th century avant-garde in Western music—supposes such noises represent a proliferation or "multiplication" of musical sounds . Around the same time, the development of electronic amplification technologies such as the loudspeaker created a new range of "impulse" noise: sporadic, unpredictable, unruly "sharp sounds" such as popping and hissing, and distortion "feedback" sounds, associated with amplification and sound-reproduction itself. The aggregation of these noises together in space mark a tipping point in the "natural" balance between "man-made" sounds and all other sounds, Hillel Schwartz suggests:

> Across the last two thousand years, humankind on occasion has matched the volume of the rest of the natural world. Across the last two hundred we have regularly surpassed it at every point along the spectrum: sirens and steam whistles on the high end, more piercing than screech of parrots or shriek of sandstorm; klaxons and loudspeakers at midpoint, howling above wolves and high winds; supersonic jets and nuclear explosions on the low end, booming above calving glaciers. (Schwartz 2011, 37)

Along this history of the evolution of noise, Schwartz also maps an emergent process whereby, over time, people came to perceive noise as ubiquitous.

In particular, postcolonial urban environments incubate a wide variety of the types of noise Russolo and Schwartz identify, and foster their intermixing. Expressive forms transform as they diffuse through these industrial and amplificational noisescapes. Brian Larkin has presented aspects of urban life in

Nigeria that resonate with, and are resonant in, the circulation of video media. He argues, for instance, that the degeneration of the sound and image quality of Nigerian video films through piracy create a sonic backdrop to the pervasive infrastructural failures (power outages, for instance) of the post-colonial oil-rich state (Larkin 2008, 61-62). Naveeda Khan has demonstrated how the *aẕān* in Lahore, Pakistan exceeds recommended limits set by the WHO (World Health Organization), posing a problem for environmental regulation methodologies that risk classifying the *aẕān* as noise (as oppose to meaningful religious speech), undifferentiated from high-decibel traffic noise, for instance (Khan 2011, 585-586). Ernst Karel's work on the soundscape of South Indian temple towns explores the fluid intermixing of religious soundings with traffic noise (Karel 2013).

I argue that the examples above underscore a kinship between a) religious expressive and sonic forms in public, and b) other forms of urban clamor, in postcolonial urban environments such as India and Pakistan. While public religious rituals may become the subjects of state concern for a variety of reasons, their "impact" on outside entities is "muted" to the extent to which such rituals "resonate" with ambient and diverse non-religious urban noises. I further wish to argue that this kinship was forged, in part, in the sonic environments of late colonial states, as the example of India in particular reveals. Specifically, while religious pubic soundings such as the *aẕān* where not treated as unwanted "noise" in colonial records, examples abound in which both religious and non-religious public sounds were both construed as forms of agitation and threats to public order.

In relation to religious sounds, Naveeda Khan, for instance, cites evidence of *aẕān* practices that antagonized Sikh neighbors in Lahore in the late 1930s, and of Hindu music performed near mosques viewed as "intolerable" by some local Muslims, about which redress and regulations was sought from the government (Khan 2011, 578-580; see also Datta 1999). Further examples show how commemoration rituals during Muharram sparked communal riots, prompting a colonial state response that included the creation of new laws and the separation of competing ritual events along communal lines. In Lucknow, between 1907-1908, and again in 1930s, Shia rituals such as a chanting in public parades during Muharram helped sparked Sunni-Shia riots. The state's response—issuing new regulations to separate Shia and Sunni public events during this timeframe—is part of the broader spirit of British colonial governance to "control" colonial subjects via their "classification," Shereen Ilahi (2007, 189-191) has argued. Similarly, records in late 1880s Mumbai reflect growing tensions between Shia Muslims and Hindus, the latter who "noisily" participated in Muharram processions by acting as "man-tigers" and "buffoons," beating "tom-toms" and "frightening people." Subsequent Hindu-Shia riots were recorded in 1893, after which Hindu leaders formed a competing Ganesh festival concurrent with Muharram, and police adopted a new policy to only grant Muharram procession licenses to Muslims. Hindu participants conceived the new Ganesh festival as an opportunity to simultaneously challenge "British authority and the Muslim community" (Nejad 2015, 93-97).

Parallel to the role, noted in colonial records, of religious sonic productions to instigate or portend discord is an anxiety about other forms of Indian "noise" as

threatening to late British rule, and a potential signal of discontent. For instance, William Mazzarella has described the desire of British administrators to incorporate cinema-going, beginning in the 1920s, into its "civilizing mission" for India, while at the same time confronting cinema's appeal to the "savage sensorium" of the "uncivilized," and its connection to the "culture-mobilizing vernacular protests" unfolding across India at the time. Concerns that British women may become objects of sexual advances, for instance, seems enfolded into anxieties about the (largely male) Indian audiences' reaction "kissing" in Hollywood films shown at cinemas: scenes which elicit "screeches and howls," "hissing and jeering," "catcalls and exclamation," "hooting," "shouting and Ah-ahing" (14-15). Brian Larkin also charts a genealogy of state concern over the "excesses" produced and allowed by the cinema—the "assemblage of built space, film, and social practice"—especially "mixed-sex activities" and prostitution (Larkin 2008, 1-2). The double-edged potential of cinematographic technologies to both be a disciplinary force, and to generate excesses that necessitate external regulations, is also reflected in Jonathan Sterne's seminal cultural history of sound reproduction technologies. While the development of sound reproduction technologies in the nineteenth century indexed in part a modern desire to tame nature and natural sound, he argues, noise regulations in the twentieth century in turn aimed to regulate excesses of those sonic reproductions (Sterne 2003).

Roads are another site to see this "double-edged" potential of technological development: to be, on the one hand, a rationalizing force, but also to enable new activities that prompt fresh concerns and necessitate special new regulations. In an

early example, Ranajit Guha conveys one British resident's account of the "public mood" in a north Indian city prior to the 1857 Mutiny. The account describes how *sepoys* (Indian soldiers) had "thrown off their customary quiet and respectful behavior … paraded the public roads in parties … singing at the highest pitch of their unmelodious voices, heedless of who heard them" (Guha 1999, 39). Such noises made in public, in other words, were part of activities deemed insubordinate of British rule, and counter to the "self-imposed restraints" the British expected from Indians: "Crowded streets, noisy singing, "angry scowls and haughty air" were … suspect in the eyes of those who had the most to benefit from deference," Guha writes (40).

Following Pascal Menoret, I noted in Chapter 1 how the construction of modern roads in Saudi Arabia, after a 1973 oil market boom, were conceived both to "push aside" nature and aid the state's "disciplinary mechanism" to suppress protest. Confounding intentions, Menoret defines the engagement of Saudi youths in joyriding as a type of political protest *enabled* by the road infrastructure itself (Menoret 2014, 8, 12). The conundrum mirrors aspects of late colonial administration and development of urban India, in which roads both a) enable free-flowing "patterns of commerce and circulation" and b) signal "a fractured, disputed modernity and a looming potential for disorder" (Arnold 2012, 120). Colonial records include evocative accounts of urban noise from Calcutta, one of which evokes the tension between a lost sense of "peace," perhaps now consigned to the "slow, orderly pace—even the innocence—of village life" (122):

> in the midst of a babel of shouting and noises from humans, engines and motors, panting coolies stagger under great bales, goods-trains

> shunt on sidings, motor-lorries lumber through the [dock] gates, Ford cars and bullock- carts bump and jerk over the uneven ground. Here is none of the imagined Eastern peace and leisure. (126)

In a related example, a former British army officer, writing about his experiences in the last years of British rule in 1946-1947, laments Calcutta's "dystopian traffic" as a "signifier for imminent (if not actual) disorder" and "epithet for a once-orderly Raj" (127).

These various examples of religious and non-religious sonic productions in public spaces share a character related to their defiance of colonial rule and public order. Their proliferation and imbrication together in modern post-colonial urban environments is, I argue, a legacy of this shared tension with colonial rule. Given the burden in Dubai to a) create an environment conducive to free trade and unencumbered circulation of goods, and b) carefully manage a majority foreign-born Asian population, the Dubai state comes to resemble colonial state: a "throwback to an 'Orient' that is no longer possible elsewhere" (Kanna 2011, 3). The need to preserve free trade while managing a foreign population compels the state to strictly regulate the public sphere (Davidson 2008a, 143), and consequently, to carefully regulate public noise.

Noise regulation and interiority in Dubai

The World Health Organization's guide to regulations suggest that "developing" world public noise levels are higher than in developed regions, and that noise regulation comes to be considered an environmental regulation "luxury" for states (Berglund et al. 1999, iii). The guide also defines noise in terms of decibel-

levels that are injurious to health, but acknowledges that "noise" is determined through assessments of sound as "unwanted." The regulation code on noise in Dubai, enforced by the Dubai Municipality, imports the language and logic of the WHO prescriptions, while emphasizing proper noise "containment" techniques. Consider, for instance, the language of one regulation: "Acoustic barriers or walls should be constructed when noise cannot be sufficiently reduced by careful siting of noise sources."[80] The regulations also invoke the sensitivity of religious sites, partly a concern given the imperative to protect the social environment of Arabia as the seat of global Islam: the home of Mecca and Medina. Another regulation describes how:

> Any type of construction or demolition activities even if only for relatively short periods may significantly generate high levels of noise that can cause disturbances to its surroundings in any adjacent sensitive receptors or premises such as residential, hospital, schools, mosque, and similar buildings.[81]

The logic of careful seating and containment of noise sources, in light of "sensitive receptors," guides the Emirates' approach to regulating industrial noise. By extension, it informs how Shia leaders design *imāmbārgāhs* in Dubai, and how police intervene at gatherings.

As I mentioned above, and in other chapters, my informants talked about Shia experience in Dubai as structured by *pābandī*, or "restriction," (from Sanskrit *Pratibandh*) a concept rooted in the English notion of being "bound" or enclosed. In this context—in particular, as the city develops—unwanted sources of noise,

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[80] Dubai Municipality. 2011. *Requirements for the Reduction of Construction and Demolition Noise.* Available online [accessed Mar 3, 2016]: https://www.dm.gov.ae/wps/wcm/connect/50bb9616-d361-43f7-bbfe-2bd930526fd7/TG9.pdf?MOD=AJPERES

[81] ibid.

including Shia practices, are forced inward, or are isolated outward: behind walls and indoors—or through careful seating outward—in a way that mirrors the rules for situating and enclosing construction sites behind sound barriers. I argue that the compartmentalization and isolation of Shia rituals constricts participants' opportunity to reach and influence outsiders—to effectively protest the treatment of Hussain's faction at Karbala—but retains the opportunity for their religious development as Shia practitioners, via the logics of indoor ritual performance, and to reach others via recordings that circulate widely outside Dubai.

Containment and isolation of migrant life

I note a variety of examples from my fieldwork that indicate how both a) migrant activities associated with living, play, and intimacy, and b) large-scale religious activities to commemorate Shia martyrdom become outwardly isolated or inwardly contained, as a consequence of public space regulations, construction designs, and creative configurations of space. In December 2010 and January 2011, I attended large Muharram *majlises* organized in the city-center of Abu Dhabi, Dubai's neighbor to the east. In contrast to Dubai's urban "sprawl," the majority of Abu Dhabi city lies concentrated on an island just off the mainland in the Arabian Sea. Organizers of the *majlises* had converted a parking lot, near a major shopping center and lined by high-rise buildings on two sides, into an outdoor assembly area. A roughly seven-foot black tarp had been erected around the perimeter, to insulate the space. The recitations and sermons, loud and highly amplified (though not

overpowered or distorted), echoed off the nearby buildings, which included a hotel and hospital.

Three years later, several informants in Dubai told me that the site had been forced to relocate. The municipal government had granted the *jamā'at* committee a desert land-plot just outside of the city for the once-yearly Muharram gatherings, commemorating the death anniversary of Imam Hussain. Where a temporary wall had not functioned as an adequate acoustic barrier, a "careful sitting" of the noise away from reverberations and sensitive receptors was enforced.

In Dubai, I tracked workers in my research who lived in distant settlements at the edge of the city, whose presence there reflected dynamic demographic shifts following Dubai's 2009 real estate market crash. In the 2000s, demographic studies indicated a growing population of working Asian "migrants" in city center areas of Dubai—offset by also-growing "labor camps" at remote desert locations—and the consequent shift of the local population to the "suburbs." To counter the growing dominance of expatriate workers in these city center areas, state authorities attempted to discourage room-sharing in villas—the type of living arrangement for Kadir and his group—by issuing evictions (Elsheshtawy 2010, 214, 219). The 2009 market collapse created new opportunities for expatriate workers—including Latif and his employees and a few friends, who shared a flat together in the International City development—to find cheaper rents at a distance from the city.

Reflecting on the fate of that development, one journalist-researcher described International City as Dubai's most "ham-fisted" attempt to bolster its "global metropolis" self-image. Designed as a series of ten country-themed mixed

residential-commercial "clusters"—including "England," "Russia," "Italy," "Spain," "France," "Greece," "Persia," "China," "Morocco," and "Emirates"—the developer Nakheel "encouraged" nationals from those countries to "buy or rent in their national section" (Brook 2014, 378). Finished in phases between 2006-2008, the development failed to attract such a diverse foreign population, and by 2011 news reports chronicled the complaints of some "residents" that an "invasion" of Asian bachelors that were driving out "families."[82] By this time, the development had already been criticized in news reports for shoddy construction and plumbing issues.[83] Despite these challenges and the long drive to and from the city, Latif appreciated the lower rents and the better acceptance of room sharing; he shared his one-bedroom apartment with eight other roommates. He made the half-hour's drive most Thursdays to visit the *imāmbārgāh* in central Dubai. When I visited him and his colleagues on occasional Fridays, I would take the metro train to its last stop, where he would pick me up in his car. We would then drive the final 10 minutes to the development.

Despite some high profile coverage in the news media, partly based on an official "one villa, one family" campaign of the Dubai Municipality begun in 2008,[84] a variety of my research informants lived in shared villa rooms in the area near the

[82] Hilotin, Jay. 2011. "International City: Squalor township." *Gulf News*, February 24. Available online [accessed Jan 20, 2016]: http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/property/international-city-squalor-township-1.766738
[83] Naylor, Hugh. 2010. "International City awash in sewage." *The National*, May 3. Available online [accessed Jan 20, 2016]: http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/environment/international-city-awash-in-sewage
[84] Ferris-Lay, Claire. 2008. "Power being cut from 20 villas per day in campaign." *Arabian Business*, Dec 17. Available online [accessed Mar 3, 2016]: http://www.arabianbusiness.com/power-being-cut-from-20-villas-per-day-in-campaign-41832.html

Shia *imāmbārgāh* in central Dubai.[85] Furthermore, with rising rents in 2012, the practice of "partitioning" spaces within a villa seemed to increase.[86] News media reports, then and now, often characterize these practices as a type of renters' resourcefulness. In an effort to offset high rent costs, news stories detail how renters—typically Asian—will subdivides space in their apartment using available materials—drywall, plywood, curtains, even cabinetry—and then sublet the partitioned spaces.[87]

As residents and rental-housing seekers, various informants and I engaged this market first-hand. One informant, a barber named Nafeez, once took me in mid-summer to view vacant for-rent "partitions" in the residential area around the central *imāmbārgāh*. Like Kadir and his team, Nafeez lived in a single-story villa, in a room partitioned-off on one or more sides by thin drywall. He had encouraged me to try to live near him, in this central area of Shia activity, and he supposed affordable options would be available. We viewed one such living space, which comprised a long narrow partitioned-off area with a sloping ceiling created by a descending

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[85] News reports cited a similar and more recent campaign in Abu Dhabi, with a more explicit title: "Say No to Bachelors Thronging Residential Neighbourhoods – Together we Ensure Superior Life for Residents." See, Sankar, Anjana. 2014. "'Say no to bachelors' campaign in Abu Dhabi." *Gulf News*, Aug 20. Available online [accessed Mar 3, 2016]: http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/general/say-no-to-bachelors-campaign-in-abu-dhabi-1.1374351

[86] Kannan, Preeti. 2012. "Villa-share crackdown as Dubai rents rise." *The National*, July 17. Available online [accessed Mar 3, 2016]: http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/villa-share-crackdown-as-dubai-rents-rise

[87] Dhal, Sharmila. 2013. "Soaring UAE rents push residents into bed spaces." *Gulf News*, Aug 21. Available online [accessed Mar 3, 2016]: http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/general/soaring-uae-rents-push-residents-into-bed-spaces-1.1222814.
See also: Al Serkal, Mariam. 2014. "Violations for flat sharing in UAE on rise." *Gulf News*, Jan 16. Available online [accessed Mar 3, 2016]: http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/violations-for-flat-sharing-in-uae-on-rise-1.1278237. Nair, Deepthi. 2015. "When tenants act as landlords." *Khaleej Times*, Oct 9. Available online [accessed Mar 3, 2016]: http://www.khaleejtimes.com/business/real-estate/when-tenants-act-as-landlords.

staircase above. He seemed disappointed, and we gave up the search soon thereafter.

In general, I see partitioning as a creative practice of interior space-use that works to overcome the economic constraints of a high-priced housing market. Partitioning is viewed as an illegal practice by the Dubai Municipality,[88] undesirable to the extent that it displaces families, creates a male-dominated public spaces, and diminishes the diversity of residential neighborhoods. Still, I argue that the iterative segmentation of space is a practice that perpetuates the compartmentalization of migrant life in Dubai, and is thus consistent with the imperatives of noise-containment and visual surveillance in public space in Dubai. Forms, instantiations, and modes of expression of migrant life in interior spaces are multiplied as an outcome of these partitioning practices.

In cases where practices are not adequately or feasibly contained, as in the case of the large outdoor majlis in Abu Dhabi, which I described above, they are often isolated outward, I find. Practices of home and room sharing, for instance, force certain private and intimate activities into secluded public spaces outside the home. I noted through my research, for example, how certain activities at public beaches were alternately restricted or allowed at different times of day. During daytime hours, I noted beaches were patrolled by policemen, who sometimes acted undercover and dressed as beach-goers themselves. During these times, single men

[88] Municipality bylaws, for instance, include provisions for grant and cancelling permits for "group occupation" buildings. Dubai Municipality. 2003. "Local Order No. 11: Public Health and Safety of the Society in the Emirate of Dubai." Available online [accessed Mar 3, 2016]: http://login.dm.gov.ae/wps/wcm/connect/aaf4063b-9372-455a-9562-5b3707b7db5c/Local+Order+No++%2811%29+of+2003+Concerning+Public+Health+and+Safety+of+the+Society+in+the+Emirate+of+Dubai.pdf?MOD=AJPERES

dressed in street clothes were restricted from entering the beach, while families and appropriately beach-clad singles were allowed. At night, I noted on a few visits how beaches attract clandestine lovers: those who seek intimacy which can be achieve neither in public nor private, due to room sharing.

In research, I developed a relationship with Nafeez (who I first introduced in Chapter 3) and a few of his friends, who were barbers employed at a shop adjacent to the Shia mosque central to the Urdu-speaking community. Nafeez was in his late twenties, unmarried, and a native to Rawalpindi where he is part of a non-*Sayyid* caste. Compared to others with whom I worked in Dubai, Nafeez and his friends more-openly discussed their pursuit of intimate relationships. Nafeez, who was more reserved than his more brash roommates and friends, described to me on a few occasions his "Filipino girlfriend." He told me he would sometimes meet her at the beach late at night.

On one late summer night, after 1am, I accompanied Saad, Nafeez, and his friends to the beach. While Saad, Nafeez, and I sat on the beech, we watched as the others joined a large group of men in the water, playfully interacting and chattering. Nafeez pointed to one Filipino couple in the water, commenting to me that they were having sex. Nafeez had teased one member of the group for his apparent pursuit of sexual contact with men, and now as we watched as he interacted with the others in a close group in the dark water. Saad and Nafeez continued to laugh and made teasing remarks.

I relate these various examples in the section—of large-scale Muharram *majlises* in the Abu Dhabi desert, of migrants living in partitioned spaces or in

distant Dubai residential developments, and of late-night intimate and playful beach activities—to illustrate how the logics of spatial containment and isolation apply to both loud religious ritual activities and to more mundane forms of migrant everyday life and downtime activity in and around Dubai.

Sonic regulations and religious site construction

While religious site constructions and public sonic productions are immersed in the sonic environment regulated by the Environmental Planning and Studies Section of the Dubai Municipality, rules do not address these structures and productions directly. Another stand-alone body, with dual political and religious leadership and technically outside the structure of the Dubai Municipality, has some direct oversight over religious site construction and religious sonic productions: the Islamic Affairs and Charitable Activities Department (IACAD). Their guide to new mosque construction, for instance, includes the requirement that planners submit a ten-year "Guaranty of insulation works," as well as a "Guaranty of the electrical equipment" including "sound amplifiers" and "speakers."[89] The department also establishes maximum decibel levels for recitations broadcast over outdoor loudspeakers, such as the *adhān* and Friday prayers, and fields and responds to complaints about volume levels from the public. As the Grand Mufti of the IACAD describes, "Aathan (sic) should be loud enough to call [Muslims] to perform their

[89] Available online [accessed Jan 13, 2016]: http://www.iacad.gov.ae/EN/Pages/ConditionsOfBuildingNewMosque.aspx?menuid=170

most important duty in life, which is salaah, or prayer…. Athaan is to inform and not to disturb. If the speakers' volume is not correctly set, it needs to be corrected."[90]

Nonetheless, police interventions at *imāmbārgāh* and *majlis* gatherings reflect the guidelines of environmental regulations. One 1991 local order, for instance, enumerates among those potential noise-emitters worthy of control "any gathering or meeting" at any "residential premises or place of assembly."[91] During my time in Dubai, police began enforcing crowd control after Thursday night *majlis* at the *imāmbārgāh* I frequented, mandating the dispersal of crowds from around the gathering site after 11pm. The enforcement effectively forestalled the type of gatherings that had kept me up in my north Indian fieldwork in 2008.

Given the emphasis on indoor rituals in Shia practice in Dubai, and the construction standards enforced by the IACAD, I trace how leaders, planners, and designers became preoccupied with imāmbārgāh construction in the community. Consider, for instance, a conversation I had with Hamid, a young worker in Kadir's group who I chronicled in Chapter 3. He once described for me an *imāmbārgāh* he helped design and build, on a return trip from Dubai to his hometown in India, and showed me a photo of the completed structure. The polished wood of the building stands in contrast to the whitewashed painted-cement nineteenth-century *imāmbārgāh* structures that dot the landscape in this north Indian state. Inspiration

[90] Huang, Carol. 2011. "Mosque's prayer call volume to be tested after residents complain." *The National*, May 8. Available online [accessed Jan 13, 2016]: http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/mosques-prayer-call-volume-to-be-tested-after-residents-complain

[91] Dubai Municipality. 1991. "Local Order No. 61: On the Environment Protection Regulations in the Emirate of Dubai." Available online [accessed Jan 13, 2016]: http://login.dm.gov.ae/wps/wcm/connect/b2fa679f-23b8-4d43-b187-51505df5d021/LocalOrder61of1991English.pdf?MOD=AJPERES

for this type of construction, I argue, comes from the sound-insulating style of construction particular to the Dubai.

At the time of my research, the *jamā't* committee in charge of the main *imāmbārgāh* used by this Urdu-speaking Shia community in Dubai was conducting a campaign to raise money for a new sound and video projection system. This would be added to the already soundproof and insulated *imāmbārgāh* structure, which itself had been recently renovated. Fundraising efforts extended through the community in Dubai, and through connections to the broader Khoja Shia community internationally as well. As I began to describe in Chapter 1 above, the Khoja community are a highly-mobile out-migrant merchant community, who are originally native to Gujarat.

The well-insulated and well-funded Khoja imāmbārgāh had a reputation among my research participants for being subdued. Other older *imāmbārgāhs*, though louder, still observed rules and conventions that fit the logic and standard of containment. One sat tucked back off a main street in a central Dubai neighborhood, beyond a small parking lot; a single story structure that blends with the surrounding bungalows, and the apartment buildings with street-level shops that rise around it. The religious structure is signified by a pole rising above it, capped with a hand and black flag. Wooden shoe racks line the outside of the imāmbārgāh, sitting empty during the day. At night the surrounding buildings cast dark shadows on the *imāmbārgāh*—which claims, in a description in Urdu framed on its entry wall, to be the oldest in Dubai. Sajdali, who I chronicled closely in Chapter 1, mentioned to me that this was the only permanent *imāmbārgāh* when he moved to Dubai in 1974.

The small parking lot in front of the *imāmbārgāh* opens onto a narrow and busy market street, in an area of Dubai dominated both by South Asian shops and residents. The U.A.E.'s only Hindu temple, itself built in the late 1950s, sits less than one thousand feet from the *imāmbārgāh* site. At night, the bright neon lights of stores and a KFC with large glass windows at one counter illuminate the street, which hums with the clamor of cars and the voices of shoppers and residents milling about. Still, this building is easy to miss, which I suggest is partly a consequence of a strict policy, inscribed onto the exterior wall above the imāmbārgāh's shoe racks, which read in Urdu: *imāmbārgāh kē bāhar bēṭhē manaʿ hē* ("sitting outside the imāmbārgāh is forbidden"). The sign ensures that the crowd may not exceed the narrow door of the majlis hall, which nonetheless remains open onto the dark parking lot area, and a welcoming area lined with mats. Even on a gathering night, the space remains both visually concealed and sonically contained from the nearby market street.

Another *imāmbārgāh* sits in a residential area near the same bazaar, just off a six-lane main road. It is constructed in inverse proportions to the Khoja *imāmbārgāh* and most others I visited in Dubai, featuring a small interior area and a large outdoor courtyard. The outdoor area is lined on street-facing side with a high cement wall, but has no ceiling other than a light tarp overhang at one end. The second-floor balconies of residential buildings across the street are visible from the courtyard area. Given the organization of loud outdoor *mātam* at this site, the rituals and structure of the site would seem to contradict the containment conventions observed by other *imāmbārgāhs* and *majlis* gatherings.

The *imāmbārgāh* is situated around a corner from two large hotels. One is known as a site of prostitutes; the sidewalk space in front is flanked by women standing, soliciting and being solicited by customers. The other hotel is known for its African dance club. The pulsating rhythms of the club echo more clearly in the quieter and darker residential back alleys behind the hotel—the area in which the imāmbārgāh is located—than they do on the main street. Finally on the other adjacent corner is a tall dark building under construction, draped along its side with long tarps. The sounds of jackhammering and clanging machinery also echo in the alley behind the imāmbārgāh.

Like the majlis activities, I noticed that construction work at this building site was suspended nightly around 10pm, reflecting rules contained in the Environmental Section's guidelines:

> As noise from construction and demolition activities is predominantly impulsive in nature, it is prohibited to do jack hammering and impact pile driving during nighttime hours.[92]

Still, while the regular rhythmic clamor of *mātam* performances ring out in the area around this *imāmbārgāh*, I never observed police intervene or heard concerns voiced by organizers or participants. In relation to so many other noise producers in the environment, especially those of similar pulsating quality—the thumping of a nearby dance club and the hammering of machinery on metal at a new construction site—these religious sounds are enfolded into the ambient framework of this area of Dubai. The permeation of the sound of Shia rituals into ambient public space is

[92] Dubai Municipality. 2011. *Requirements for the Reduction of Construction and Demolition Noise.* Available online [accessed Mar 3, 2016]: https://www.dm.gov.ae/wps/wcm/connect/50bb9616-d361-43f7-bbfe-2bd930526fd7/TG9.pdf?MOD=AJPERES

unusual for the region, given some of the history I charted above, and trends of police enforcement I noted in fieldwork. But open-air *mātam* is preserved in this location as an outcome of Dubai's commitment to promoting global business, and thus to accepting certain forms and affects of cosmopolitan nightlife. Activities at this site thus reinforce the link between the survival of Shia rituals and promotion of global commerce in the region.

Despite sincere doctrinal aversions to prostitution, music, and dancing, Shia practitioners at this imāmbārgāh tacitly accept and enfold hotel-club sounds into the experience of performing religious rituals. The hotels in the area are often used as landmarks among my informants, to describe the location of these *imāmbārgāhs*. As sites for prostitution and club-going, they were the subject of sometimes-intense derision and speculation in my conversations. On the one hand, this is hardly surprising—the tension between Islamic life and such cultural practices as drinking and dancing is often acute in this region, where parts of the U.A.E. and all of Saudi Arabia strictly prohibit alcohol sales and consumption, for instance. In this community where rumors, speculation, "backbiting" (*ghība*), and slander against fellow members is widespread, speculations and accusations on members who attend clubs—that is, drinking and dancing in public, or merely being around this—are among the most ominous. Nadim would occasionally broach this issue with me in a form of a sarcastic repartee, and characteristic of interactions we often had. Playfully trying to entrap me, for instance, he would sarcastically and off-handedly suggest, "oh, let's go to a club," then wait for my response. At other times, others

members would slander him to me by suggesting that he attended clubs in his spare time, though I never had any reason to believe he actually did.

The playful language about club-going contains sinister implications (jokes and rumors about engaging in prostitution have less serious implication, though still contain the sense of *ḥarām*), and marks club-spaces in Dubai with intense derision, speculation, and anxiety. These are anxieties about organizing one's self and maintaining self-discipline in an environment laden with distraction. While driving past a cemetery on our route back to meet other friends after one Thursday night majlis, amid a loud conversation, one member turned to me: "did you say *ṣalawāt* [a blessing to Allah] upon passing the cemetery? No? You're suppose to." Some in the car laughed, in response.

So too the imāmbārgāh is situated in a perfunctory way "behind the Park Hotel," though generally also in the soundscape and environment of temptation and sin (*ḥarām*) in Dubai, especially surrounding dance clubs. The failure to connect the language of sinful club-going to the *ambient sounds* emanating out from these nearby sites—despite their visual spectacle and their acknowledged landmark status in the neighborhood—is an occlusion made possible by the *majlis'* own sonic force. For participants at this *imāmbārgāh*, the pulsating sounds of the surrounding urban environment, including the sounds of *ḥarām*-activities, are tacitly enfolded into the sonic range of the religious ritual itself.

Ethics of vocal production: the recording studio

In Dubai, attempts at sound insulation and practices of nested partitioning become superlative in the design of the recording studio. As I sought to better understand the aesthetic experience of labor and migrant life in Dubai, I pursued friendships with poets and reciters throughout my fifteen research months in Dubai. I became closest with Saad, a reciter from a non-*Sayyid* caste who was born and raised in Lucknow, India; a place where I too spent formative years in the study of Urdu language and poetic production. At times he related certain details of the place to me. He saw, for instance, in the activity of late-night swimming on Dubai's Arabian Gulf open beaches, escapes of his own into Gompti River as a child, learning to swim.

When I met him, Saad was in his mid-twenties and unmarried. He had come to Dubai five years prior to work as a salesman. We met in December outside the Shia mosque, just as he was promoting a new album of music video recordings of Shia praise and mourning poetry. He played the DVD for me and some of his older Pakistani Shia friends in their barbershop near the mosque. The high-quality video images featured him performing *mātam* while reciting, and gesticulating along with the story, interspersed with dark and fiery still images of abstract scenes from the lives of the Imams. By the following September, he had saved enough money of his own from his job in Sharjah, as a salesman in a jewelry shop, and had raised some from friends and patrons in Dubai and back home in India, to return to the studio to record a new album of *nōḥē*.

The studio Saad used, as I learned over my first days attending his recording sessions, had been established and was operated by another young member of the

Shia community in Dubai, who I'll call Gulam Ali. Gulam was in his late twenties and a member of the Khoja community and was a manager at a global Dubai-based firm in the metal trade industry. Like many others of his generation from the Khoja community in Dubai, Gulam was born in Dubai, though he and his family retained their citizenship in Tanzania. He had a wife and two young children in Dubai, and he spoke English, Arabic, and Urdu each with native fluency.

Gulam's recording studio is located just over the Dubai border in the nearby-Emirate Sharjah. He constructed it inside a small one-bedroom apartment in a multistory complex, accessed by a sandy unpaved road just off the main Dubai-Sharjah highway. He had converted the main living room area into what he called a "video room," with a green screen at one end, in front of drywall thoroughly covering windows. It was a space he used to video record the reciter, in order to make accompanying videos for recitations. He had partitioned the bedroom into the audio recording studio, a space that was further partitioned in half by a wall with a large window in its center. The "recordist" sat on one side while the performer recited from the other side. The glassed window between them was a bit haphazardly lain and fixed in place, such that it once came crashing down onto the recording equipment during a session, one recordist told me on the second day. Nonetheless, the area occupied by the reciter is soundproofed—to avoid "annoying the neighbors"—while the recordist's area, where I sat during recordings, could not contain the playback over the speakers, Gulam explained to me. Thus—in the spirit of noise/sound concentration—the recordists used headphones.

The recording space of acoustic deadness[93] and slapstick (and slapdash) structural breakdown is also one marked by a specter of internment and death. For instance, Saad's primary recordist for the initial sessions of the project told me a story one night during a break in the recording session. Datu was a close friend of Saad (who I first introduced in Chapter 1), and was a member of the Khoja community with dual Kenyan and American citizenship. He had lived for many years in the United Stated and he had many family members there. However he was unmarried and lived alone in Dubai. While he had initially migrated to Dubai from the U.S. for a job, he had been laid off and when I knew him he struggled to find work. He thus eagerly accepted occasional recording jobs from Saad or others when they solicited his help. His story one night described earlier episode in the studio:

> One night in Ramadan we were recording a track … I was on the recordist side, but Gulam had his iPad and was both reciting with the others and controlling the system from the reciter's side. The door was closed; I went to the toilet! I went to the kitchen and smoked a couple of cigarettes; I went to the toilet. I come back half an hour later and there they are in here naked! They are down to their boxers and shorts.

To which I interjected, partly missing the point: "Oh, because they were hot."

But he continued,

> The recording kept going on; they had actually made their *wasiyyat* (bequethments) to each other. Because they thought I had gone home!

The punch line of the story relates to the broken doorknob connecting the reciters' side of the studio recordists' side, whereby the door could only be opened from the recordists' side. Moments later, adding the humor of the situation, while

[93] Thanks to Peter McMurray, who has developed this concept in relation to Shia sonic experience in Berlin.

contemplating the still broken doorknob in front of us, Datu asked the other recordist if he had a screwdriver; he did not.

The studio as a space of internment and death overlaps with its constructed acoustic deadness, a feature important to any recording environment, though especially, I argue, one situated in a plural residential apartment complex on the margins of cosmopolitan Dubai. Entombment and death in the context of *nōḥē* recording also relate to central themes in the poetic verses themselves. Datu told this story during a brief break in Saad's session, where he recorded a *nōḥa* about the experience of Hussain's teenage son Ali Akbar (who was martyred) at Karbala. The chorus of the poem relates his demise at young age: *Nōjawānī tērī Ali Akbar, ʻārīya ḵẖāk par ragaṛtī hē* ("Your youth Ali Akbar, worn down to bare ash"). Other verses mourn his death on the sandy battlefield: *Abhī marnā, nahīṅ nūr-e-naẓar* ("Now dead, the light of your image is out").

The recording process itself begins and ends life elsewhere. At various times on the first day of recording, Saad called his relative in India—who wrote the verses—to confirm the accuracy of the elegiac words (*kalām*) as he had written them (from dictation). Ultimately, the raw multi-track audio files would be sent to an audio engineer in Pakistan for "mastering and mixing," and MP3-CDs of Saad's record would be distributed to shops and sold across India and Pakistan, Saad explained to me. The sense of death and sonic deadness of the studio environment is contrasted with this sense of the recording process as relatively free-flowing, uncontained, and connected outward.

The concern for pitch

As I described above, the regulation of *adhān* (or *azān* in Urdu) pertains most directly to sound volume levels, and is concerned with the disturbance of others. In this section, I begin to consider how sound in Islamic vocal productions is disciplined in another way: tonally. The contrast between excess and disciplined sound in the recording studio is perhaps best captured in the recordists' and performers' concerns and struggles with pitch, and thereby instrumentation.

In a most basic sense, concerns over pitch are concerns about relativity. It could be the concern between various members of an ensemble who desire to maintain a unified tonality in relation to each other. Additionally, in both monophonic and polyphonic music, concerns over pitch might relate to the effort to maintain the same pitch or tonality over time: to end in the same tonal structure in which one begins. Both types of concern, over ensemblic and temporal relativity, presided in the *nōḥa* studio recording sessions I observed. By the fifth night of Saad's session, problems with pitch seemed to imperil the project's progress.

In part, pitch concerns in Islamic expressive performances are confounded by popular injunctions in Islam against "music." Put another way, since music is sometimes considered *ḥarām* in Islam, tonality and pitch in sung poetic performance are not consistently as important as they are, or in the manner that they are, in Western tonal systems. *Adhān* recitations, for instance, run a wide gamut of relative pitch accuracy. During my fieldwork in a north Indian village in 2008, I awoke most mornings, predawn, to a starkly off-pitch and out-of-tune *adhān*, over a crackling speaker. In contrast, in the cavernous marbled interiors of Dubai's large

shopping malls, high-pitched and tuneful *adhāns* reverberate and resonate against the smooth surfaces, unencumbered by speaker noise.

At *majlis* gatherings in Dubai, I noted a wide range of pitch accuracy as well, in poetic performances. Precise and disciplined vocal modulations often induced audiences' rapt attentions and expressions of appreciation, with exclamations like *mā shā'Allāh*, ("God has willed it") for instance. Still, other recitations were appreciated for other reasons. Sajdali, who I chronicled closely in Chapter 1, recited one *marṣiya* at the main *imāmbārgāh* in Muharram, in which his voice modulated so far out of pitch that it was difficult to discern the melody. Half way through, however, when the emotional charge of the elegy increased, he started to cry as he recited. His performance morphed to more closely resemble wailing, an affect that fit the heightened emotion of the poem, and also mirrored the audience's wailing responses.

Anxiety over elements of "musical" production impinging on the *nōḥa* recording process leads to some creative solutions for maintaining pitch and rhythm. A small keyboard, which sat in the corner of the recordists' side of the studio, sat unused during the sessions I attended. Gulam explained that he used it to create the "scale" that he used for the various tracks. This consisted of a sustained chord of synthesized strings that droned underneath each track—and in the ear of the performer—in order to help the performer stay on pitch and in the right key. Additionally, in order to maintain a constant meter throughout the recitation's performance, Gulam used a track of resonant chest beats. For this, he had recorded himself and others striking hands against their bare chests. Then, in production, he

had layered those beats on top of each other in the audio program, and modified them to be well defined and synchronous, to have sufficient bass-register resonance, and to reverberate. The track is functional for the recitation recording process, and as such represents a creative and improvisational circumvention of the role of percussive instruments in music-making. The track also becomes a component of the final recording, where it fills the "audiences'" role to provide beat chests in time with recitation.

Trouble for Saad's recording process began as a crisis over a series of off-pitch tracks he had recorded, over several pain-staking hours on previous nights. On the fourth day of my participation, Gulam Ali noticed the clash between Saad's verses and the scale, much to his exasperation. He accused Saad of not having heard the scale properly: "*āp nē scale kē sāth nahīṅ paṛha* [you did not recite this with the scale]." Then pointing at the "down" volume level on the track marked "scale" in the Pro Tools session, he added "*Scale bālkul down ta. Scale ke sāth paṛhna hē, ya. Is lī'ē banārahā hēṅ scale, tracks meṅ karnā hē.* [The scale (track volume was turned) way down. Recite with the scale, friend! That's why we make the scale, for doing the (vocal) tracks.]"

Datu had not heard the out-of-pitchness, perhaps partly because he'd not kept the scale loud enough, Gulam supposed. Compounding the problem, however, was likely his "pitch-deaf"-ness as Datu had described it to me in confidence on the second night. On the second recording night, Saad also remarked, with Datu's approval, that it was "easier to recite live rather than recite in a studio." He continued, "if we are reciting live, nobody will come and ask you if your pitch is high,

your scale is down. [Studio recording] is very difficult." In a later car ride home with Saad, after the conclusion of late night recording session, Saad conveyed his disappointment with Datu's work and his inability to discern tonality problems. Still Saad worried about his friend being otherwise unemployed: the reason he had hired Datu in the first place. He conveyed to me that he felt constrained by his sense of loyalty and duty to his friend.

Why could the standards of live performance (where ensemblic coordination is also necessary) not apply in the studio? In one way, I suggest that these recordists and reciters have internalized and accepted certain *universal* standards and conventions of recording. While Datu and Saad prize the freedom that live performance affords the reciter, Gulam Ali invokes "beauty" to describe the ideal lacking in Saad's recording. Gulam's softer and on-pitch "dummy track,"[94] for instance, in the studio contrasted with Saad's louder, more forceful, and above-pitch (sharp) recording from days earlier. "*Āp kyoṅ mērā dummy nahīṅ sūna?"* [Why didn't you listen to my dummy track?], he asked Saad after listening to Saad's recording of *Ab tō ājā'ō, Imam Mahdi* ["Now you come, Imam Mahdi."]. To highlight the contrast, he played back his dummy track alone, then played Saad's louder and above-pitch version. "*Ḵẖūbṣūratī nahīṅ hē*" [this is not beautiful], Gulam commented. Later, after listening to *Ab Madine nahīṅ jā* ["Now we will not go to Madina"], he remarked, *Ab āp zōr lagāyā* ["Now you're being too forceful"]. Laughing a bit as he played it back for Saad, he added, "*is kō soft karē,"* ["make it soft."]

[94] The initial rough vocal track that acts as a guide to the reciter and is played in the reciter's ear during the actual recording session.

At Saad's request, they listened through all recordings Saad had made from the previous sessions, in which Gulam assessed their tonal qualities, including out-of-pitchness ("*scale sē out*," "*pitch out*," or "*pitch sē bāhar*"). This exchange about his *Naujawani teri Ali Akbar* recording, in which Gulam teased Saad for his tone problems, is indicative. A third member, Rafiq, is present: the lead singer for Saad's chorus, a Pakistani and accomplished *nōḥa* recorder himself.

> Rafiq: *Achhā kyā mā shāʾAllāh*. [nicely done, by God.]
> Saad: *Pitch, lē, key, scale, vaḡḫēra?* [Pitch, tune, key, scale, etc?]
> Gulam: *ṭhīk hē ziāda nahīṅ hē, lēkan wāʿẓ̱ī bahut hē* [It's ok, it's not a big problem. But it's very preachy / bombastic]

The term *wāʿẓ̱ī* derives from the Arabic *wāʿẓ̱* meaning "preacher" or "admonisher" (Richardson 1829, 1626). A survey of scholarly literature reveals the frequent occurrence of *wāʿẓ̱ī* or "waazi" in studies of Hausa-speaking populations in West Africa, where the word has been adopted from Arabic as the general term for Islamic preaching, often as broadcast over loudspeakers via cassette tapes (Clough 2006, 720; Larkin 2014, 991-992). In the scholarship on contemporary Islamic practice in South Asia, one study in Pakistan aligns "waaz" with "khutba," a more familiar Urdu term for "sermon" (Abbasi et al. 2011), while another in Bangladesh describes the practices of *jamāʿt* leaders giving "*waaz mahfils*," or "public lectures" on Islamic themes (Shehabuddin 2008, 593). Historical studies on Shia practice in South Asia, especially a few focused on Bombay at the turn of the twentieth century, identify *waaz* as a type of sermon especially performed during the Muharram mourning period (Masselos 1982, 47; Chandavarkar 2002, 193; Kidambi 2007, 122). Additionally, some recent ethnographic studies suggest the salience in "*waaz*" as a

central homiletic component of contemporary Bohra (Shia Ismaīlī) rituals during Muharram (Blank 2001, 82-87; Munaim 2014, 36-38). Finally, one account of contemporary religious leadership in Bangladesh identifies "*waazins*" as those who perform religious orations "sentimentally," and then equates *waazin* with the more familiar terms for "preacher" in Urdu-usage: "maulana" "muftee," and "imam" (Hossain 2013, 705).

I thus translate *wā'ẓī*, in this context of the studio discussion, as an adjective meaning "preachy" and "bombastic:" as describing someone who recites passionately or loudly. The salience of *wā'ẓ* as a component of Bohra Shia gatherings helps explain Gulam's use of the term, given the geographical proximity between Bohras and Khojas as both communal groups native to Gujarat in Western India. Still, beyond this encounter in the studio, I heard this term nowhere else in my research. Gulam smirks as he says *wā'ẓī bahut hē*, and Saad chuckles. Gulam's comment extends from his broader criticism of Saad's failure to use "soft" and "beautiful" tones. I thus take *wā'ẓī* as a pejorative, and opposite to notions like softness and beauty.

As the conversation continues, Saad generalizes a connection between *wā'ẓī* and Urdu speech generally:

> Saad: [laughing], *Urdu istemāl kartē hēṅ, wā'ẓī bahut hē!* [laughing] *Zabardast!* [When you use Urdu, you are generally bombastic. Forceful/Fantastic!]
> Gulam: [laughing quietly, affirming]: *wā'ẓī hōtē hē*.
> Saad: *wā'ẓī hōtē hē, achhā bōlā* [it's bombastic, well said]

This view of Urdu is partly an outcome of language politics particular to this region, I argue: Arabic and English are both associated with elite culture and education.

English *nōḥē* in Dubai are more toneful and restrained than Urdu *nōḥē*. Given the context in Dubai in which it is deployed—a context, for instance, in which the Asian foreign worker is configured as deviant and a moral threat[95]—it suggests the unrefinement of Urdu language. Gulam's reference to *wā'ẕī* as a form of teasing Saad in this context reflects tonal differences between the Khoja-led gatherings and those at the other Urdu Indo-Pakistani imāmbārgāhs. I interpret Saad's embarrassment about his out-of-pitch-ness in the studio, in other words, to be partly an extension of his anxiety about his use of Urdu. Having been born and raised in Dubai, English is Gulam's first language, and I understand Saad to have some discomfort with his own English proficiency in relation to Gulam.

The challenge to stay within pitch, I argue, gains greater force in Dubai's environment of restriction, containment, and delimitation (sonic and otherwise) than it does in the more "noisy" public environments and larger gatherings—and less insulated private spaces—of India and Pakistan. The standards of the recording process force performers into strict pitch-consciousness. As such, disciplining one's voice into pitch is essential to the success of the recording, and thus to the project of reaching a wide audience, which all Shia elegiac expression aims to do.

Time "constraints:" worklife and recording

I end by considering how work patterns and other daily routines become structured through the studio recording process. At the end of one early recording session, Datu and Saad stood in the playback area, monitoring the audio snippets as

[95] I developed this more fully in the previous chapter.

the recordist made edits to them, to align them with the rhythm. Datu, who had an alert on his cell phone indicating prayer timings, turned to Saad and remarked the *fajr aẕān* (early morning call to prayer) was playing now. Twenty minutes later, the three wearily agreed to end the session, and Saad and Datu went into the video room to pray. It was now Wednesday morning.

At the time, Datu only employment was his part-time occasional work as a recordist at the studio. Though he helped Saad free of charge, as a close friend, other reciters occasionally contracted Datu for his sound engineering assistance. Without regular "daytime" employment, and in light of the still-excessive daytime heat, Datu and I prepared to return to Dubai, to sleep. Meanwhile, Saad prepared to return to work at his jewelry shop. He described how he would sleep a few hours in the shop before the owner arrived at 9am. He was also scheduled to return the following night to record. Given their friendship, Gulam had waved his studio rental fee as well: Saad only had to the pay for the time of his recordist. He thus explained to me that he would continue to take whatever odd times were available at the studio. When I asked about how he would manage his schedule with such little sleep, he mentioned that he would sleep on his day off: Friday. He shrugged, then smiled and added, "*al-ḥamdu lillāh* (praise God), I am busy."

Gulam explained to me that Ramadan was a peak time period for recording at his studio: a time of already reduced work schedules and diminished daytime productivity, as I described more fully in Chapter 2. Seeking times to avail the studio space from Gulam free-of-charge, Saad accepted these few weeks in September, though the post-Ramadan timeframe forced Saad to carefully balance the time

requirements of sleep, work, and recording. A few days later, when I asked again about his work performance in light of the compressed time, he said only that the work in the studio sustained him, and compelled him to "focus" at work so that he could continue his studio sessions "in the name of Imam Ali," and continue to pay his recordist.

The demands of sleep, work, and recording mutually compressed each other, and eliminated "downtime." By the time of the studio sessions, I had known Saad for nearly a year. In that time, he had always been hard to connect with. "Busy, busy, busy," Nadim griped one night months earlier, as we tried unsuccessfully to reach him on his cell phone. Still, after the studio sessions began, Saad completely avoided any downtime meetings, such as those between myself, Nadim, Asgar, and Saad, which I described at length in Chapter 1 above.

Between the demands of Gulam to stay within pitch and the demands to transition quickly between sleep, work, and recording, Saad seemed determined to discipline his actions. I argue that clearly delineated and compartmentalized timeframes, and the logic of spatial compartmentalization in Dubai, combine to conform a sense and ethic of "compressed life" for a working reciter like Saad. I see this as an ethic of life conformed in and through Dubai's particular environment of regulation and spatial containment.

Improvisation in nōḥa studio recitation

I end by reconsidering how creativity can be a form of activity consistent with an ethic of containment. I suppose that the conversion of a one-bedroom

apartment into a sound insulating and partitioned recording studio is a creative use of (limited) space and of available construction materials, and similar to other forms of partitioning that foreign residents in Dubai engage in. I have also noted how the approach to performing *nōḥē* in the space of the studio was highly disciplined by the concern to adhere to pitch and regular rhythm, structured by the imperative to "listen" to the dummy-track, and represented graphically by the sound oscillation waves depicted in the Pro Tools session. Still, within this structure of constraint and pitch-discipline, I also noted Gulam and others to perform improvisationally, and to "riff" vocally on certain poetic lines, in the short breaks between the recording sessions, and as a way to demonstrate different recitation techniques. I argue that these practices are particular to the studio performance environment, and to other enclosed environments. They resemble the type of idle recitations I observed Saad to engage in while driving with me and others, in my analysis in Chapter 1. I consider this improvisational mode an outcome of the contained environments in general, and to the studio in particular.

At one point, Gulam demonstrated his own proficiency as a reciter, by demonstrating his vision for the recitation of *Ab tō ājā'ō, Imam Mahdi*. As Saad and his "chorus" members gathered around, Gulam demonstrated the tune that he had written for Saad, but also expanded on it. In a widely modulating tonal pattern, he "riffed" for a minute on the a repetition of the name "Imam Mahdi." He smiled as he improvised this line, at once seeming to demonstrate to Saad how the tune could be performed, and also trying to inspire him to be on-pitch. Saad and his chorus

members listened with rapt attention, and expressed their appreciation vocally: a reaction to Gulam's vocal and technical prowess.

Urdu poetic recitation generally—religious and non-religious genres—feature elements of improvisation within rule-governed tune-frameworks and as an exercise in recombination of set tonal components. Regula Qureshi describes a set of "mostly individually improvised tunes," for instance, in *tarannum*: a secular Urdu poetry genre. As such, they are "based on similar overall melodic ingredients but differing widely in individual outline and tonal grouping" (Qureshi 1969, 433). I note how her description here reflects the "reconstruction" process in *bricolage*.

Furthermore, Qureshi describes how in *g̱ẖazal*, a popular Urdu secular genre, "considerable variability" is based on "conscious musical improvisation within a consciously perceived musical framework." By contrast, she describes how in Islamic poetic genres, including Shia "chants," "the reciter's personality remains more subdued," and describes a "general lack of musical variability and performance features expressing personal style" (Qureshi 1969, 442). To the extent that Gulam and other performers riff creatively on lines and key words in poems—recreationally and as part of the recording process—I argue that studio spaces enable a wider range of creative expressions than that which is acceptable in public performance environments. Given the relative emphasis on studio recording in this Dubai community, I suppose that forms of creative religious expressions flourish in relation to Dubai's compartmentalized environments.

Conclusion

At a most basic level, I associate ethnography with empathy. Often in this research, as a method of inquiry into the experiences of my informants, I aimed project and imagine myself as I "might be or might have been *under other circumstances*" (Jackson 2013, 10, emphasis original). The characters that fill this ethnography represent a cross-section of the Urdu-speaking Shia community in Dubai. My findings both build on and expand on other Gulf-region ethnographies of Asian working and business classes. Still, I chose to focus on the small group in order to excavate the subtle linkages between their social, religious, and work lives. A more cross-sectional study with larger participant enrollment would not have allowed me to develop such close relationships with the small group of community members that I did. They are the key characters in the ethnography I have presented in the preceding chapters.

This dissertation has tracked how free market forces and state regulatory enterprises create gaps in the built environment of Dubai, into which foreign migrants project various experiences. A coherence of "experience" particular to migrant life in Dubai owes to ethics that transcend across life activities, and are made salient by various "environmental forces:" economic, regulatory, natural. Across five chapters, I have dwelled in these spatial gaps in the built environment. Recall, for instance, the "partitioned-partitions" of interior space, which function as both migrant living spaces and sound recording studios in Dubai, and sometimes also carry a sense of interment, in Chapter 5. The segmentation of space via drywall partitions is a way that migrants are able to reclaim space. Members of this Shia

community build sound studios to perform and record poetry, which serves to protest key injustice perpetrated in the Islamic community. Forms of organized public protest are disallowed in Dubai. Or consider the calm empty outdoor public spaces in Chapter 4, creations of the regulatory environment and emblematic of public order in Dubai, but into which migrants project anxieties both about concealed crimes in Dubai, and about criminal activity, violence, and first-hand victimhood experiences in Pakistan.

Recall the particular excesses of construction explored in Chapters 2 and 3. For instance, the vacant residential buildings in distant Dubai luxury developments, overpriced for the market, and for which Zakir struggled to find renters. And then the tidy and expansive office suite Zakir's firm occupied, vacant by early evenings, where Zakir managed a rapid flow of images on his Facebook during idle time. And recall the high-quality but poorly-finished and inexpertly-installed building materials in expansive luxury construction projects: a situation which perpetuated the vacancy of these unfinished spaces beyond construction completion deadlines, to the consternation of site managers and owners. And in Chapter 1, think of the built spaces that support Dubai's cosmopolitan growth and free-flow of people and goods—smooth roads and austere blood clinics—in which migrants combine multiple discrete ambitions into unified and coordinated actions.

On the one hand, these spaces are the key sites of migrant self-making that I followed in this project. I suppose that these spaces help conform ethics of activity germane to various life domains. Chapter 1, for instance, traced the lives of a few members of the Shia expatriate community in Dubai, for whom an ethic of efficiency

in workplace environments and work rituals mirrored a preference for efficient downtime and religious practices. I explored how blood donation works to serve the broader community of Dubai and to accrue religious benefit (*ṣawāb*). Chapter 2 considered how an environment flush with mobile technologies—the U.A.E. has the highest cell phone penetration rate in the world—and with unused real estate allows for a vibrant virtual experience with "excessive" religious rituals via mobile images. On Facebook, I noted how Shia users aim to curate excessive experiences, managing a chaotic flow of images, while filtering out undesirable ones. I note here how members of this community cultivate an ethic of "managed excess" in their engagement of imagery on mobile technologies and computers. This "crisis management" ethic helps members align forms of religious and worklife struggle.

In Chapter 3, I note first how constructions in the post-boom era continue, though at a diminished rate. These fuel a market for services contractors, like my friends in the community, whose company provide painting and other finishing services. Specifically, the lure of grandiose constructions, and the materiality of high-quality woodwork, for instance, draw them into inflated estimations of their own work. That is, excesses of scale and quality in constructions in the environment fuel an aspirational spirit in this group, partly nurtured in the downtime environment of their shared living space, and create the conditions under which they overvalue their work. In this way, they repeatedly fail in contract negotiations, in spite of lingering large-scale financial debt. The ethic of striving they cultivate in their work propels an unstable energy that perpetuates their life in Dubai, an ethic

that also destabilizes their social relationships, undercuts their work productivity, and isolates their religious activities.

In Chapter 4, I explored how, in a highly regulated environment—characterized by pockets and periods of public calm and by a general absence of visible criminal activity—speculations and anxieties about criminal activities flourish in the Pakistani migrant community. I traced the tellings and content of crime stories that informants told me, in which they "projected" anxieties about concealed criminality in Dubai onto actual lived experiences and anxieties about violence and crime in Pakistan. Ethics of storytelling—that is, ethics of "reflection" and of "grounding" narrative in detail—allow members to align anxieties about worklife and about criminal activity.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I explore the effects of regimes of Shia and migrant constraint on the activities of expressive sonic production. I examine how a) the imperative on Shias to contain religious rituals in the Dubai, and b) the disciplines germane to studio recording in relation to pitch and tone, are consistent. In the struggle to manage various forms of constraint—imposed by work schedules and the demands of studio recording—I examine how constraint becomes a way-of-life for reciters. In this way, I see "constraint" or "containment" as an ethic of organizing space and of organizing one's life in Dubai. In the ever-multiplying interior spaces of sonic production and migrant living—partitions of partitions—I observed them to pursue self-discipline in line with "neoliberal" expectations and accumulating religious "benefit."

Glossary of Key Urdu and Arabic Terms

Word	Language	Roots / related words	Definition
ʻĀshūrā	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)	*ʻAshr* ("ten" in Arabic)	Literally "tenth." "Sacred day of the tenth of Muharram sanctified by Imam Husain's martyrdom" (Qureshi 2005, 429)
ʻAzādārī	Persian, Urdu (from Arabic and Persian)	*ʻAzaʼ* ("lamentation" or "mourning" in Arabic) (Richardson 1829, 1006) and *–dari* ("the art of"); *Zamindari* ("system of landholding")[96]	Mourning (Emami 2006, 604), literally, the art or system of the practice of mourning
ʻIbādat	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)		Worship (Platts 1884, 758)
ʻUlamāʼ	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)	*ʻĀlim* (sing.), ʻilm ("knowledge" in Arabic, Persian, Urdu)	Scholars, religious scholars, theologians (Wehr 1979, 745)
Aʻmāl	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)	*ʻAmal* ("work" in Arabic)	Deeds, doings, actions (Platts 1884, 61)
Azān (Adhān)	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)	*Idhan* ("ear" in Arabic)	Call to prayer
Ćehlum	Persian, Urdu (from Persian)		Literally "fortieth," or "fortieth day" (Platts 1884, 463)
Fāʼida	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)		Benefit, usefulness (Platts 1884, 776)
Hawāla	Arabic	*Hawal* ("around" in Arabic) (Wehr 1979, 253)	Literally "bill of exchange" (Wehr 1979, 254) or "transfer" (Richardson 1829,

[96] Merriam-Webster. *Zamindari*. Available online [accessed July 1, 2016]: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/zamindari

			585).
Imāmbārgāh	Urdu (from Arabic & Persian)	*Imām* ("head of a religion") (Platts 1884, 79), *-gāh* ("place"), *'Īdgāh* (Eid prayer site), *bandargāh* ("sea port" in Persian and Urdu) (Emami 2006, 154)	Literally "Place of the Imams," functionally a Shia community gathering center[97]
Jabr	Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)		Force, oppression, constraint, compulsion (Platts 1884, 375)
Jamā't	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)	*Jāmi'a* ("association" in Arabic), *majma'* (gathering place in Arabic) (Wehr 1979, 160-161)	Community, party, troop (Wehr 1979, 160)
Julūs	Urdu (from Arabic and Persian)	*Jels* ("to sit" in Arabic)	Procession (Qureshi 2005, 231)
Kafāla	Arabic		Sponsorship, pledge, security (Wehr 1979, 976)
Majbūrī	Urdu, Persian (from Arabic)	*Jabr, jābr, majbūr*	Compulsion, constraint, oppression (Platts 1884, 375)
Majlis	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)	*Jels* ("to sit" in Arabic)	Assembly, congregation (Platts 1884, 1003)
Mana'	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)		Forbidden, prohibition (Platts 1884, 1078)
Marṣiya	Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)		"Elegy, dirge (as a genre commemorating

[97] Here, the dictionary definition is lengthy and reflects the "imāmbārgāh's" historically more-specific function, especially in indigenous Indo-Pakistani Shia culture: "The place to which the *ta'ziya* is conveyed and kept in the *Moḥarram*, and where offerings are made to the dead; a building in which the festival of the *Moḥarram* is celebrated, and in which services are held in commemoration of the death of *'Alī* and his sons *Hasan* and *Husain*; (the same building is sometimes used as a mausoleum for the family of the founder)" (Platts 1884, 79-80)

			Imam Husain's martyrdom)" (Qureshi 2005, 579) [98]
Mātam	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)		Grief, mourning (Platts 1884, 978) [99]
Mōminīn	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)	Singular: *Mōmin*	Believers (Qureshi 2005, 622)
Niyat (Niyah)	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)		Intention, aim, purpose (Platts 1884, 1165)
Nōḥa	Persian, Urdu (from Persian)		Lamentation, dirge (Qureshi 2005, 652) [100]
Pābandī	Persian, Urdu (from Persian)	*Pā* (foot), *band* (bound or closed)	Restraint, restriction (Qureshi 2005, 142)
Ṣawāb (Thawāb)	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)		"Recompense," "reward (especially, of obedience to God) (Platts 1884, 369)
Shajara	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)		Tree, genealogical tree (Platts 1884, 722)
Wājib	Arabic, Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)		Necessary, obligatory (Platts 1884, 1172)
Wāʿẓī	Persian, Urdu (from Arabic)	*Wāʿẓ* ("Preacher" or "admonisher" in Arabic) (Richardson 1829, 1626).	Preaching (colloquially preachiness / bombast)
Zabar Karna	Urdu (from Persian)	*Zabardastī* (Superiority,	To practice violence on, to

[98] "Elegy or heroic narrative, often highly dramatic, consisting of 6-line strophes. Chanted usually by group in unison. The chanted *marsiya* may be followed by a *marsiya* poem in the style of formal oratory" (R. Qureshi 1981, 45).
[99] "Dirge, simple, highly expressive but passionate, even martial in character. Accompanied by chest beats on the part of the standing audience. Concluded by responsorial calls invoking the martyrs to continuous chest beats" (R. Qureshi 1981, 45).
[100] "Dirge, simple, highly expressive and lyrical in character. Couplets or strophes usually with refrain, sung solo or by a group" (R. Qureshi 1981, 45).

		oppression, force in Urdu)	oppress (Platts 1884, 615)
Ẓulm	Urdu (from Arabic)	*Zālim* (tyrant)	Tyranny, oppression, violence (Platts 1884, 755)

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Curriculum Vitae

Brian Tilley was born on March 7, 1983 in New York, New York, U.S.A. He completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in May 2005 from Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, U.S.A., with a major in Asian Studies and a minor in Mathematics, receiving departmental honors in Asian Studies. After graduating, he completed one year of ethnographic research in North India funded by a Fulbright Student Grant. He completed his Master of Arts degree in Anthropology in October 2011 from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A. As a graduate student at Johns Hopkins, he taught an undergraduate seminar course and was Teaching Assistant for three other undergraduate courses in anthropology. He completed fifteen months of dissertation field research in the United Arab Emirates from 2010-2012, funded by grants from the National Science Foundation, American Institute of Pakistan Studies, and Johns Hopkins University. He served as a research assistant at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in 2013-2014. He completed his Ph.D. degree in Anthropology in October 2016 from Johns Hopkins University.